PARTISAN REVIEW

NOVEMBER, 1948

ANDRE GIDE
Theseus (a novelette)

STEPHEN SPENDER
The Life of Literature

RICHARD CHASE
Dissent on Billy Budd

PAUL VALERY
The Angel (a poem)

ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS
Pound, Jeffers, and Other Poets

R. W. FLINT
Fiat Luce

THE CREATIVE LIFE IN OUR TIME
Letters by Elizabeth Bowen,
Graham Greene, V. S. Pritchett

11

50c

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A superb new history of American writing!

LITERARY HISTORY

of the United States

Edited by ROBERT E. SPILLER, WILLARD THORP
THOMAS H. JOHNSON, HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

Forty-eight contributors—including such distinguished names as H. L. Mencken, Carl Sandburg, Joseph Wood Krutch, Allan Nevins, Henry Steele Commager, Malcolm Cowley, and many others—have joined their efforts to make this a complete critical, biographical, and historical record of American literature and its makers.

Here, in three volumes, is a magnificent history, beginning with the earliest known fragments of New World writing, and concluding with the rich, complex flowering of our literary culture today. The first two volumes examine every facet of our literature. The third volume is a unique bibliography of tremendous range.

Publication is November 29. Place your order with your bookseller before that date, and the 3-volume set, boxed, will be $18.00 ($20.00 after publication). Or you may order the first two volumes separately, for $14.00 before publication or $15.00 after. Volume III alone is $7.50.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ABEL AGEE ANDERSON AUDEN BELLOW BERRYMAN BLACKMUR

BISHOP BOGAN BRAUNSCHWEIG

BURNHAM CLARK CHIAROMONTE

CUMMINGS DEWEY DOS PASSOS

DUPEE ELIOT FARRELL GIDE

FEARING FITZGERALD JOLAS

GARRIGUE GOODMAN HORTON

GREENBERG GREGORY JACKSON

HOOK KAFKA KAPLAN LOWELL

MACDONALD MacNEICE MOORE

McCARTHY MORRIS PHILLIPS

NAGEL PORTER ROSENFELD

WHEELWRIGHT WILSON WRIGHT

JARRELL SYLANDER VIGNERON

RODGERS TROY SYPHER ZABEL

THE PARTISAN READER

1934 - 44

edited by
William Phillips
and
Philip Rahv

This 700 page anthology contains the best work published in Partisan Review in its first ten years, some of the finest writing in the modern period: twelve stories, a large selection of poetry, and of cultural, social, and literary criticism.

"No regular reader of Partisan Review will be surprised by the excellence of the anthology."
—Saturday Review of Literature

"The most serious collection now available."
—New York Times

RAHV ROSENBERG SHAPIRO SHUBERT STEIN STEVENS SWEENEY TATE

SCHWARTZ SCHAPIRO SILONE SPENDER

THOMAS TRILLING WILLIAMS

special combination offer expires december 31 1948

The Partisan Reader retail price $3.75
and one year of PR regular price $5.00

total $8.75
Both for $5.50

name .....

street .....

city..... zone..... state.....

PARTISAN REVIEW, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLEMENT GREENBERG

Joan Miró

A Monograph

SIX COLOR PLATES AND

OVER 100 ILLUSTRATIONS

price . . . $10

THE QUADRANGLE PRESS, Inc.

15 WEST 44 STREET

New York 18, N. Y.

INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP

Buy the books you want and Get a 25% bonus on the amount you spend

Here is the the name of the book club whose members can order the books they want and who get a 25% bonus on the amount they spend for those books.

It has caught on with the book-buying public, because the idea is so sound these days.

Why not send us your order and join now? All you need do is send us the names of the books you want. We ship your books and bill you later. You get your 25% bonus on the amount you spend and after you buy four books you use the bonus to purchase more. Write today.

BONUS BOOK CLUB

Dept. P-6, 61 W. 56 St., New York 19

The Bonus Plan does not include certain Text, Technical, Foreign or otherwise restricted books.

CONTRIBUTORS

ELIZABETH BOWEN is the author of many noted novels, among them "The Death of the Heart," "The Hotel," "The House in Paris," and "To the North."

GRAHAM GREENE'S latest novel is "The Heart of the Matter," published by Viking Press.

V. S. PRITCHETT is a British novelist and critic whose latest book to be published in this country is "The Living Novel."

HORACE GREGORY, poet and critic, is at present preparing a new volume of verse for early publication.

STEPHEN SPENDER, who taught at Sarah Lawrence College last year, is returning to England this fall.

RICHARD CHASE, who is in the English Department of Connecticut College, is a frequent contributor to **PR** and other literary periodicals.

ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS, short story writer and literary critic, teaches English and creative writing at Smith College.

R. W. FLINT is a young writer who has studied at Columbia and Harvard.

The frontispiece by Henri Matisse is reproduced throught the courtesy of the Kleeman Gallery, New York. The size of the original is 11" by 14¾".

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poetry in Translation

C. F. MacIntyre, who translated the four books listed here, prefers original meaning to perfect rhymes. He employs unusual rhyming devices to bring the poets' intentions into lucid, beautiful English. In each book, the poem and the translation are printed on facing pages.

Paul Verlaine

SELECTED POEMS. A translation which faithfully reproduces Verlaine's poetry at its best: "a poetry at once childlike and subtle, entirely of nuances, a poetry evocative of the most fugitive echoes of the heart." $3.75

Charles Baudelaire

ONE HUNDRED POEMS from *Les Fleurs du Mal.* $5.00

Rainer Maria Rilke

FIFTY SELECTED POEMS $3.50

THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN MARY $2.50

At your bookstore

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PR PARTISAN REVIEW

EDITORS:
William Phillips, Philip Rahv

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
William Barrett, Delmore Schwartz

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER:
Mary Wickware

ADVISORY BOARD:
James Burnham, Allan D. Dowling, Sidney Hook,
James Johnson Sweeney, Lionel Trilling

PARTISAN REVIEW is published monthly by Added Enterprises at 1545 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Subscriptions: $5 a year, $8 for two years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $6 a year, $10 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $0.50. In Canada: $0.60. (Sole distributors of PARTISAN REVIEW in Canada: Jonathan David Company.) Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright November, 1948, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Reentered as second-class matter, January 9, 1948, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOVEMBER, 1948 VOLUME XV, NUMBER 11

CONTENTS

FRONTISPIECE, Henri Matisse

THESEUS, André Gide 1159

THE CREATIVE LIFE IN OUR TIME, letters by Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and V. S. Pritchett 1175

THE ANGEL, Paul Valéry 1190

IN GEORGE SAND'S GARDEN, Horace Gregory 1192

THE LIFE OF LITERATURE, Stephen Spender 1194

DISSENT ON BILLY BUDD, Richard Chase 1212

REVIEWS

POUND, JEFFERS, AND OTHERS, Robert Gorham Davis 1219

VARIETY

FIAT LUCE!, R. W. Flint 1250

CORRESPONDENCE 1256

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MATISSE SKETCHING, self-portrait (pen and ink, 1937)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

André Gide

THESEUS

Translator's Note

Thésée is the most recent of Gide's works, but it is one which had been long projected. For more than thirty years the idea had possessed him, from time to time, of committing to paper a new manipulation of this ancient legend. Other images of Theseus reverberate, as is natural, within this newest version. The Theseus of Plutarch is here, even down to the feathery branches of asparagus among which the beardless hero carried out the first of his summary but appreciative sexual experiments. The Theseus of Racine is here, for ever aghast at the murderous favors accorded to him by the gods. But Gide's Theseus is a different, more constructive character. He discourses to us in the cloudless evening of his life with the motiveless lechery of his early manhood quite laid aside, and the more disreputable episodes (so carefully husbanded by Plutarch) discounted as fables. Nor do we see him reduced, like the Theseus of Racine, to the point at which an anonymous exile alone offers the possibility of requital. It is rather for Oedipus to propose this point of view, in the dialogue which closes the book.

One can distinguish many others among the elements which Gide has metamorphosed for our enjoyment. The full-scale evocation of ancient Crete owes something to Flaubert, something to Sir Arthur Evans; but the essentials of tone and pace, the golden sensuality and the pondered detail, are Gide's alone. And what concept could be more Gidian than that of the ordeal in the Labyrinth—an ordeal, not of endurance, but of pleasure? In the Minotaur himself, that flower-struck beauty, lulled into hebetude by the delights of his surroundings, we glimpse the Sudanese negroes whom Gide had watched in Tunis, nearly sixty years ago, stuffing flowers into their nostrils.

Present and past are mingled, moreover, in the construction of Theseus himself. Pre-Roman and Post-Renaissance traits have coalesced in this egregious hero. Wraith-like, other admirations of Gide's—not to speak of Gide himself—compose part of Theseus; nor can all these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

affinities be passed on to the English reader, since some of them may be described only through verbal parallels in the original text. When Theseus says "Je n'ai jamais aimé la demeure, fût-ce au sein des délices," it is possible to recall that Gide has written of his old friend Paul Valéry that "Fût-ce dans les délices, il ne lui plaisait pas d'attarder."

Valéry has always symbolized, for Gide, an ideal undistractable vigor; and Theseus, too, is endowed with the same grand individualism. Theseus at times is not so much a man as a committee, with Gide at is head.

Olympian Goethe takes his place on the committee, beside Valéry and beside Racine's Titus. For whereas, in politics, Theseus pursues a modified Stalinism, and he has, in the life of the senses, the uninhibited command of enjoyment which Gide has tried to transplant from the Tunis of 1894 into the Western Europe of our own epoch, he also derives, in religion and in personal morality, from the Goethe whom Gide has pictured in his preface to the Pléiade edition of Goethe's plays. Even his motto, "Passez Outre," which clangs like a bell-bouy throughout the story, is attributed also to Goethe. Theseus, as much as Goethe, valued love as a liberating force; and, like him, he knew when to have done with it. Nor can one fail to detect the Goethean affirmation which Theseus opposes to the mysticism of the transfigured Oedipus. There Theseus makes, on Gide's behalf, an act of confidence. The story of Theseus, once begun, took on a panoramic aspect, as if Gide were out to display every resource of art and language, and to rediscover his own spiritual history in the story of the founder of Athens. No palpable city bears witness to Gide's own long effort; but he has passed on his conviction that man has not yet said his last word; in the last few years he has gathered up the ends of a lifetime of work; his language has taken on a definitive grandeur; and it is only just to acclaim him, as he has acclaimed Goethe, as "the finest example, at once grave and smiling of what man can wrest from himself without the help of Grace."

J. R.

I

I wanted to tell the story of my life as a lesson for my son Hippolytus: but he is no more, and I am telling it all the same. For his sake I should not have dared to include, as I shall now do, certain passages of love; he was extraordinarily prudish, and in his company I never dared to speak of my attachments. Besides, these only mat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tered to me during the first part of my life; but at least they taught me to know myself, as did also the various monsters whom I subdued. For "the first thing is to know exactly who one is," I used to say to Hippolytus; "later comes the time to assess and adopt one's inheritance. Whether you wish it or not, you are, as I was myself, a king's son. Nothing to be done about it; it's a fact; it pins you down." But Hippolytus never took much notice; even less than I had taken, at his age; and like myself at that time, he got on very nicely without it. O early years, all innocently passed! O careless growth of body and mind! I was wind; I was wave. I grew with the plant; I flew with the bird. My self knew no boundaries; every contact with an outer world did not so much teach me my own limits as awaken within me some new power of enjoyment. Fruit I caressed, and the bark of young trees, and smooth stones on the foreshore, and the coats of horses and dogs, before ever my hands were laid on a woman. Towards all the charming things that Pan, Zeus or Thetis could offer, I rose.

One day my father said to me that things couldn't go on as they were. "Why not?" Because, good heavens, I was his son, and must show myself worthy of the throne to which I should succeed. . . . Just when I was feeling so happy, sprawled naked among cool grasses, or on some scorching beach. Still, I can't say that he was wrong. Certainly he was right in teaching me to rebel against myself. To this I owe all that I have achieved since that day; no longer to live at random—agreeable as such licence might have been. He taught me that nothing great, nothing of value and nothing that will last, can be got without effort.

My first effort was made at his invitation. It was to overturn boulders in the hope of finding the weapons which Poseidon (so he told me) had hidden beneath one of them. He laughed to see how quickly I grew strong through this training. With the toughening of my body there came also a toughening of the will. After I had dislodged the heaviest rocks of the neighborhood, and was about to continue my unfruitful search by attacking the flagstones of the palace gateway, my father stopped me: "Weapons," said he, "count for less than the arm which wields them, and the arm in its turn for less than the thinking will which directs it. Here are the weapons. Before giving them to you, I was waiting to see you deserve them, I can sense in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you now the ambition to use them, and that longing for fame which will allow you only to take up arms in defense of noble causes, and for the weal of all mankind. Your childhood is over; be a man. Show your fellow men what one of their kind can be, and what he means to become. There are great things to be done. Claim yourself."

II

Aegeus, my father, was one of the best; all that could be wished. In point of fact I suspect that I was only his son in name. That's what I've been told, and that great Poseidon begat me. In which case it's from this god that I inherit my inconstancy of temper. Where women are concerned, I have never known how to settle down. Aegeus sometimes stood rather in my way, but I am grateful to him for his guardianship, and for having restored the cult of Aphrodite to honor in Attica. I am sorry for the fateful slip by which I brought about his death—when I forgot, I mean, to run up white sails in place of black, on the ship which carried me home from Crete. It had been agreed that I should do this if I were to return in triumph from my rash venture. One can't think of everything. But to tell the truth, and if I cross-question myself (a thing I never much care to do) I can't swear that it was really forgetfulness. Aegeus was in my way, as I told you, and particularly when, through the potions of the witch Medea, who found him (as, indeed, he found himself), a rather elderly bed-fellow, he formed the exasperating idea that a second meridian of enjoyment was his for the asking—thus blocking my career, whereas, after all, it's every man to his turn. Anyway, when he saw those black sails . . . . I learnt, on returning to Athens, that he had thrown himself into the sea.

No one can deny it. It think I have performed some notable services; I've purged the earth once and for all of a host of tyrants, bandits and monsters; I've cleaned up certain dangerous by-roads on which even the bravest could not venture without a shiver; and I've cleared up the skies in such a way that man, his head less bowed, may be less fearful of their surprises.

One must own that in those days the look of the country was hardly reassuring. Between the scattered townships there were huge stretches of uncultivated waste, crossed only by unreliable tracks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were the dense forests, and the mountainous ravines. At the most dangerous points, robber gangs had taken up their positions; these pillaged, killed, or at best ransomed the traveler, and there were no police to stop them. These incidents combined with the purposeful ferocity of wild beast and the evil power of the sullen elements until one could hardly tell, when some foolhardy person came to grief, whether the malignity of the gods had struck him down, or merely that of his fellow men. Nor, in the case of such monsters as the sphinx or the gorgon who fell to Oedipus or to Bellerophon, could one be sure whether the human strain, or the divine was preponderant.

Whatever was inexplicable was put on to the gods. Terror and religion were so nearly one, that heroism often seemed an impiety. The first and principal victory which man had to win was over the gods.

In a fight, whether with man or with god, it is only by seizing one's adversary's own weapon and turning it against him (as I did with the club which belonged to Periphetes, the dark giant of Epidaurus) that one can be sure of final victory. And as for the thunderbolts of Zeus, I can tell you that the day will come when man will possess himself even of them—as did Prometheus with fire. Yes, those are decisive victories. But with women, at once my strength and my weakness, I was always having to begin again. I escaped from one, only to fall into the lap of some other. Nor did I ever conquer a woman who had not first conquered me. Pirithöus was right when he told me (Ah! how well we used to get on!) that the important thing was never to be unmanned by a woman, as was Hercules in the arms of Omphale. And since I have never been able, and indeed have never wished, to live without women, he would say to me, as I darted off on each amorous chase, "Go ahead, if you must, but don't get stuck." There was one woman who, ostensibly to safeguard my life, would have bound me to herself by a cord—a thin one, it is true, but a fixed rein none the less. This same woman . . . . but of that, more in due time.

Of them all, Antiope came nearest to catching me. She was Queen of the Amazons, and like all her subjects had only one breast; but this in no way impaired her beauty. An accomplished runner and wrestler, she had muscles as firm and sturdy as those of our athletes. I took her on in single combat. In my arms she struggled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a leopard. Disarmed, she brought her teeth and nails into play; enraged by my laughter (for I, too, had no weapons) and because she could not stop herself from loving me. I have never leaped anyone more virginal. And little did it matter to me that later she could only suckle my Hippolytus, her son, with one breast. It was this chaste and savage being whom I wished to make my heir. I shall speak, during the course of my story, of what has been the greatest grief of my life. For it is not enough to exist, and then to have existed. One must make one's legacy and act in such a way that one is not extinguished with oneself, so my grandfather had often told me. Pittheus and Aegeus were much more intelligent than I; so is Pirithöus. But people give me credit for good sense. The rest is added with the determination to do well that has never left me. Mine, too, is the kind of courage which incites me to desperate enterprises. On top of all this I was ambitious. The great deeds of my cousin Hercules, which they used to report to me, exasperated my young blood, and when it was time to leave Troezen where I had lived till then and rejoin my so-called father in Athens, I refused altogether to accept the advice, sound though it was, to go by sea because that route was the safer. Well I knew it. But it was the very hazards of the overland route, with its immense detour, which tempted me; a chance to prove my worth. Thieves of every sort were beginning once again to infest the country, and did so with impunity now that Hercules was squandering his manhood with Omphale. I was sixteen. All the cards were in my hand. My turn had come. In great leaps my heart was bounding towards the extremity of my happiness. "What have I to do with safety!" I cried. "And a route that's set in order." I despised comfort and idleness and unlaurelled ease. So it was on the road to Athens by way of the isthmus of the Peloponnese that I first put myself to the test, that my heart and my arm together taught me their full strength, when I cut down some well-known and well-hated robbers: Sinnis, Periphetes, Procrustes, Geryon (no that was Hercules, I meant to say Cercyon.) By the way I made a slight mistake at that time, where Scyron was concerned, for he turned out afterwards to have been a very worthy man, good-natured and most helpful to passing travellers. As I had just done away with him it was soon agreed that he had been a rascal.

Also on the road to Athens, in a thicket of asparagus, there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smiled upon me the first of my conquests in love. Perigone was tall and supple. I had just killed her father, and by way of amends I got her a very handsome son: Menalippes. I have lost track of both of them—breaking free, as usual, and anxious never to lose any time. I have never allowed the past to involve or detain me: rather have I been drawn forward by what was still to be achieved; and the most important things seemed to me always to lie ahead.

So much so that I won't waste more time with these preliminary trifles which, after all, meant only too little to me. Here I was on the threshold of an admirable adventure. Hercules himself never had one like it. I must tell it at length.

III

It's very complicated, this story. I must say first that the island of Crete was a power in those days. Minos reigned there. He held Attica responsible for the death of his son Androgeous; and by way of reprisal he had exacted from us an annual tribute: seven young men and seven young girls had to be handed over to satisfy, it was said, the appetites of the Minotaur, the monstrous child which Pasiphäe, the wife of Minos, had brought forth after intercourse with a bull. These victims were chosen by lot.

But, in the year in question, I had just returned to Greece. Though the lot would normally have spared me (princes readily escape these things) I insisted that I should figure in the list, notwithstanding the opposition of the king, my father. I care nothing for privilege, and claim that merit alone distinguishes me from the herd. My plan was, in point of fact, to vanquish the Minotaur, and thus at a blow to free Greece from an abominable exaction. Also I was most anxious to visit Crete, whence beautiful, costly and unusual objects were constantly arriving in Attica. Therefore I set sail for the island: among my thirteen companions was my friend Pirithöus.

We landed, one morning in March, at Amnisos, a little township which served as harbor to its neighbor Cnossos, the capital of the island, where Minos resided and had had his palace built. We should have arrived the previous evening, but a violent storm had delayed us. As we stepped ashore we were surrounded by armed guards who took away my sword and that of Pirithöus. When they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had searched us for other weapons, they led us off to appear before the king who had come from Cnossos with his court, to meet us. A large crowd of the common people pressed round to have a look at us. All the men were naked to the waist except Minos who, seated beneath a dais, wore a long robe made from a single piece of dark red cloth; this fell in majestic folds from his shoulders to his ankles. His chest, broad as that of Zeus himself, bore three tiers of necklaces. Many Cretans wear these, but of a trumpery sort. Minos had necklaces of rare stones, and plaques of wrought gold in the shape of fleurs-de-lis. The double-headed axe hung above his throne, and with his right hand he stretched before him a golden scepter, as tall as himself. In the other hand was a three-leaved flower, like those on his necklaces, and also in gold, but larger. Above his golden crown was a gigantic panache, in which were mingled the feathers of peacock, ostrich and halcyon. He looked us over for some time, and then bade us welcome to the island, with a smile which may well have been ironical, since we had come there, after all, under sentence of death. By his side were standing the queen and the two princesses, her daughters. I saw at once that the elder daughter had taken a fancy to me. As our guards were making ready to take us away. I saw her lean towards her father and say to him in Greek (she whispered, but my ears are sharp: "Not that one, I beg you." And she pointed towards me with her finger. Minos smiled once again and gave orders that I should not be taken away with my companions. I was no sooner alone before him than he began to question me.

Although I had promised myself to act with all possible prudence, and to let slip no hint either of my noble birth or of my audacious project, it suddenly occurred to me that it would be better to put my cards on the table, now that I had attracted the attention of the princess. Nothing would be more likely to heighten her feeling for me, or to win me the favor of the king, than to hear me say frankly that I was the grandson of Pittheus. I even hinted that the current rumor in Attica was that the Great Poseidon had begot me. To this Minos replied gravely that he would presently clear up that point by submitting me to trial by water. In return I replied complacently that I had no doubt I should survive triumphantly any test which he cared to impose. The ladies of the court, if not Minos himself, were favorably affected by my self-confidence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And now," said Minos, "you must go and have something to eat. Your companions are already at table, and will be waiting for you. After such a disturbed night you must be quite peckish, as they say here. Have a good rest. I shall expect you to be present towards the end of the day at the ceremonial games in honor of your visit. Then, Prince Theseus, we shall take you with us to Cnossos. You will sleep at the palace, and tomorrow you will dine with us; a simple, family meal, where you will feel quite at home, and these ladies will be delighted to hear you tell of your first exploits. And now they are going to prepare themselves for the festivities. We shall meet again at the games, where you will sit, with your companions, immediately beneath the royal box. This courtesy we owe to your princely rank; and as I do not wish to distinguish you openly from your companions they shall, by contagion, rank with you."

The games were held in a vast semi-circular arena, opening onto the sea. Huge crowds, both of men and of women, had come to see them, from Cnossos, from Lyttos and even from Gortyne (a matter of two hundred stades, I was told), from other towns and their neighboring villages, and from the thickly-populated open country. All my senses were taken by surprise, and I cannot describe how foreign the Cretans appeared to me to be. As there was not room for them all on the tiers of the amphitheater, they pushed and jostled their way up the staircases and along the aisles. The women, no less numerous than the men, were for the most part naked to the waist. A very few wore a light bodice; but even this was generously cut away, in a fashion which I could not help thinking rather immodest, and exposed both breasts to the air. Men and women alike were tightly, even absurdly laced round the hips with belts and corselets, which gave to each the figure of an hour-glass. The men were nearly all brown-skinned, and at their fingers, wrists and throats wore almost as many rings, bracelets and necklaces as the women who, for their part, were perfectly white. All the men were clean-shaven, except for the king, Rhadamanthus his brother and his friend Daedalus. The ladies of the court sat on a platform which was just above our own, and dominated the arena from a considerable height. They had indulged a prodigious extravagance of dress and ornament. Each wore a flounced skirt; billowing out oddly below the hips, this fell in embroidered furbelows to their feet, which were shod in little boots of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white leather. The fastuosity of the queen, who sat in the centre of the dais, made her most conspicuous of all. Her arms and the front of her person were bare. Upon her magnificent breasts, pearls, emeralds and precious stones were embanked. Long black curls fell on either side of her face, and smaller ringlets streaked her forehead. She had the lips of a glutton, an upturned nose, and huge empty eyes whose expression one might have called bovine. A sort of golden diadem served her as a crown. It sat, not directly on her hair, but on a ridiculous hat of some dark material: this came up through the diadem and tapered into a sharp point, like a horn, which jutted far out in front of her forehead. Her corsage uncovered her to the waist in front, but rose high at the back and ended in an enormous cut-away collar. Her skirt was spread wide around her, and one could admire, upon their creamy ground, three rows of embroidery, one above the other—purple irises at the top, saffrons in the centre and below them violets spread among their leaves. As I was sitting immediately below, I had only to turn round to have all this, as one might say, under my very nose. I marvelled as much at the sense of color and the beauty of the design, as at the delicate perfection of the work.

Ariadne, the elder daughter, sat at her mother's right hand and presided over the corrida. She was less sumptuously dressed than the queen, and she wore different colors. Her skirt, like that of her sister, had only two circles of embroidery—on the upper one, dogs and hinds; on the lower, dogs and partridges. Phaedra, perceptibly a much younger girl, sat on her mother's left. Her dress had a frieze of children running after hoops, and another of younger children squatting on their behinds and playing marbles. She took a childish pleasure in the spectacle. As for me, I could hardly follow what was going on. It was all so disconcertingly new. But I could not help being amazed by the suppleness, speed and agility of the acrobats who took their chance in the arena after the singers, the dancers, and then the wrestlers had had their turn. Myself about to encounter the Minotaur, I learnt a good deal from watching the feints and passes which might help me to baffle and tire the bull.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV

After Ariadne had rewarded the last champion with the last prize, Minos declared the games closed. Escorted at that time by his courtiers he bade me come to him separately.

"I want you to come with me now, Prince Theseus, to a place by the sea where I shall put you to the test, and we shall see if you are the true son of the god Poseidon, as you claimed to be just now."

He took me to a small promontory with waves beating at its foot. "I shall now," said the king, "throw my crown into the sea, as a mark of my confidence that you will be able to retrieve it from the bottom."

The queen and the two princesses were there to see what would come of the test; and so, emboldened by their presence, I protested:

"Am I a dog, to fetch and carry for my master—even if it be a crown? Let me dive in without bait and I shall bring back something or other which will attest and prove my case."

In my audacity I went still further. A stiff breeze had sprung up, and it happened that a long scarf was dislodged from Ariadne's shoulders. A gust blew it towards me. I caught it with a smile, as if the princess or one of the gods had offered it to me. Then, stripping off my close-fitting corselet, I wrapped the scarf round my loins in its place, twisted it up between my thighs and made it fast. It looked as if I did this from modesty, lest I should expose my manhood before these ladies; but in fact it allowed me to hide the leather belt which I was still wearing, and to which was attached a small purse. In this I had, not metal coins, but some valuable stones which I had brought with me from Greece, knowing that they would keep their full value, no matter where I went.

Then I took a deep breath and dived.

A practiced swimmer, I dived deep, and did not come up to the surface until I had removed from my purse an onyx and two chrysophrases. Once back on dry land I offered, with my most chivalrous bow, the onyx to the queen and the chrysophrases to each of her daughters. I pretended to have gathered them on the bottom, or rather (since it was hardly plausible that the stones, so rare upon dry land, should have lain promiscuously at the bottom of the sea, or that I should have had time to pick them out) that Poseidon himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had handed them to me, in order that I could offer them to the ladies. Here was proof, better than proof itself, of my divine origin and my good standing with the god.

After this, Minos gave me back my sword.

Soon afterwards chariots bore us off on the road to Cnossos.

V

I was so overwhelmed by fatigue that I could hardly feel due astonishment at the great courtyard of the palace, or at a monumental balustraded staircase and the winding corridors through which attentive servants, torch in hand, guided me to the second floor, where a room had been set apart for me. All but one of its many lamps were snuffed out after I arrived. The bed was scented and soft; when they left me, I fell at once into a heavy sleep which lasted until the evening of the following day, although I had already slept during our long journey; for only at dawn, after traveling all night, had we arrived at Cnossos.

I am by no means a cosmopolitan. At the court of Minos I realized for the first time that I was Greek, and I felt very far from home. All unfamiliar things took me by surprise—dress, customs, ways of behaving, furniture, (in my father's house we were short of furniture), household objects and the manner of their use. Among so much that was exquiste, I felt like a savage, and my awkwardness was redoubled when people began smiling at my conduct. I had been used to biting my way through my food, lifting it to my mouth in my fingers, and these delicate forks of metal or wrought gold, these knives which they use for cutting meat, gave me more trouble than the heaviest weapons of war. People couldn't take their eyes off me; and when I had to talk I appeared a still greater oaf. God! How out of place I felt! Only on my own have I ever been good for anything: now for the first time I was in society. It was no longer a question of fighting, or carrying a thing through by main force, but rather of giving pleasure; and of this I had strangely little experience.

I sat, at table, between the two princesses. A simple family meal, without formality, I was told. And in fact, apart from Minos and the queen, Rhadamanthus, the king's brother, the two princesses and their young brother Glaucus, there was nobody except the tutor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the young prince, a Greek from Corinth who was not even presented to me.

They asked me to describe in my own tongue (which everybody at the court understood very well and spoke fluently, though with a slight accent) what they were pleased to call my exploits. I was delighted to see that the young Phaedra and Glaucus were seized with uncontrollable laughter at the story of the treatment which Procrustes imposed upon passers-by, and which I made him endure in his turn—chopping off all those parts of him which exceeded his statutory measure. But they tactfully avoided any allusion to the cause of my visit to Crete, and affected to see me as merely a traveler.

Throughout the meal, Ariadne pressed her knee against mine, under the table; but it was the warmth of the young Phaedra which really stirred me. Meanwhile Pasiphae, the queen, who sat opposite me, was fairly eating me with her enormous eyes, and Minos, by her side, wore an unvarying smile. Only Rhadamanthus, with his long fair beard, seemed rather out of humor. Both he and the king left the room after the fourth course—"to sit on their thrones," they said.

I still felt some traces of my sea-sickness. I ate a great deal, and drank still more. I was so liberally plied with wines and liqueurs of every sort that before long I didn't know where I was. I was used to drinking only water, or diluted wine. With everything reeling before me, but still just able to stand, I begged permission to leave the room, and it was then that the queen began to tackle me.

"My young friend . . . . if I may call you so," she began. "We must make the most of these few moments alone together. I am not what you suppose, and have no designs upon your person, attractive as that may be." And, protesting the while that she was addressing herself only to my spirit, or to some undefined but interior zone of my being, she continually stroke my forehead; later she slipped her hands under my leather jerkin and fondled my pectorals, as if to convince herself that I was really there.

"I know what brings you here, and I want to warn you of a mistake. Your intentions are murderous. You are here to fight my son. I don't know what you may have heard about him, and I don't want to know. Ah! listen to the pleas of my heart! He whom they call the Minotaur may or may not be the monster of whom you have no doubt heard, but he is my son."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At this point I thought it only decent to interject that I had nothing against monsters in themselves; but she went on without listening.

"Please try to understand me. By temperament I am a mystic. Heavenly things alone excite my love. The difficulty, you see, is one never can tell exactly where the god begins and where he ends. I have seen a good deal of my cousin Leda. For her, the god hid himself in the guise of a swan. Now, Minos always knew that I wanted to give him a Dioscurus for his heir. But how can one distinguish the animal residue which may remain even in the seed of the gods? If I have since then deplored my mistake—And I realize that to talk of it in this way robs the affair of all grandeur—yet I assure you, Theseus, that it was a celestial moment. For you must understand that my bull was no ordinary beast. Poseidon had sent him. He should have been offered to him as a sacrifice, but he was so beautiful that Minos could not bring himself to do it. That is how I have been able ever since to pass off my desires as an instrument of the god's revenge. And you no doubt know that my mother-in-law, Europa, was carried off by a bull. Zeus was hiding inside him. Minos himself was the fruit of their union. That is why bulls have always been held in great honor in his family. And, if ever, after the birth of the Minotaur, I noticed the king knitting his brows, I had only to say "What about your mother?" He could only admit that it was a natural mistake. He is very wise. He believes that Zeus has nominated him judge, along with Rhadamanthus, his brother. He takes the view that one must have understood before one can pass judgment, and he thinks that he will not be a good judge until he has experienced everything, either in his own person or through his family. This is a great encouragement for us all. His children, and I myself, each in our different ways, are working, by our individual errors of conduct, for the advancement of his career. The Minotaur too, though he doesn't know it. That is why I am begging you here and now, Theseus, not to try to do him any sort of injury, but rather to become intimate with him, and so to end a misunderstanding which has made Crete the enemy of Greece, and done great harm to our two countries."

So saying, she became even more attentive, and a point was reached at which I was seriously incommoded, while the exhalations

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of wine heightened, and mingled with, the powerful effluvium which, in company with her breasts, was escaping from her corsage.

"Let us return to celestial things," she went on, "as return we always must. You yourself, Theseus—surely you must feel that you are inhabited by one of the gods?"

What put the final touch to my embarrassment was that Ariadne, the elder daughter (and an exceptional beauty, though less attractive to me personally than Phaedra) had made it quite plain to me, before I began to feel so sick—had made it quite plain, as I say, as much by signs as by a whisper, that as soon as I felt better I was to join her on the terrace.

VI

What a terrace! And what a palace! Trance-like under the moon the gardens seemed to be suspended in readiness for one knew not what. It was the month of March, but I could sense already the delicious half-warmth of spring. Once in the open air, I began to feel quite well. Never an indoor man, I need to fill my lungs with fresh air. Ariadne came running towards me, and without a word clamped her warm lips to mine—so violently that we were both a-tremble.

"Follow me," she said. "Not that I mind if anyone sees us; but we can talk more freely under the terebinths." She led me down a few steps towards a more leafy part of the gardens, there huge trees obscured the moon, though not its reflection upon the sea. She had changed her clothes, and now wore, in place of her hooped skirt and tight surcoat, a sort of loose dress, beneath which she was palpably naked.

"I can guess what my mother's been telling you," she began. "She's mad, raving mad, and you can disregard everything she says. One thing about this place I must tell you straight away: you are in great danger. You came here, as I well know, to fight my half-brother, the Minotaur. I'm telling you all this for your own good, so listen carefully. You will win—I'm sure of it. To see you is to banish doubt. (Don't you think that's rather a good line of poetry—but perhaps you have no ear?) But nobody to this day has ever managed to get out of the maze in which the monster lives; and you won't succeed, either, my dear, unless your sweetheart (that I am, or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shall presently be) comes to your rescue. You can't begin to conceive how complicated it is, that maze. To-morrow I shall introduce you to Daedalus, who will tell you about it. It was he who built it; but even he has already forgotten how to get out of it. You'll hear from him how his son Icarus, who once ventured inside, could only get out on wings, and through the upper air. That I don't dare to recommend to you; it's too risky. You'd better get it into your head at once that your only hope is to stick close to me. We shall be together, you and I—we *must* be together, from now on, in life and death. Only thanks to me, by me, and in me will you be able to recapture yourself. You must take it or leave it. If you leave me, so much the worse for you. So begin by taking me." Whereupon she abandoned all restraint, gave herself freely to my embrace and kept me in her arms till morning.

The hours passed slowly for me, I must admit. I have never been good at staying in one place, be it even in the very bosom of delight. I always aim to break free as soon as the novelty has worn off. Afterwards Ariadne used to say: "You promised." I never gave a promise of any kind. Liberty above all things: my duty is to myself.

Although my powers of observation were still to some extent clouded by drink, Ariadne appeared to me to yield her last reserves with such readiness that I could hardly suppose myself to have done the work of a pioneer. This disposed of any scruples which I might later have had about leaving her. Besides, her sentimentality soon became unendurable. Unendurable her protestations of eternal devotion, and the tender diminutives which she slavered upon me. I was alternately her only trasure, her canary, her pupkin, her tercelet, her guinea-fowl. . . . .

I loathe pet-names. And then she read too much. "Little heart," she would say, "the irises will wither fast and die." (In point of fact, they'd hardly begun to flower). I know quite well that nothing lasts for ever; but the present is all that matters to me. And then she would say: "I couldn't exist without you." This made me think all the time of how to get rid of her.

"What will the king, your father, say to that?" I asked her. And her reply: "Minos, sweet chuck, puts up with everything. He thinks it's wisest to allow what cannot be prevented. He didn't complain of my

(*Continued on page 1227*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CREATIVE LIFE IN OUR TIME

An Exchange of Letters*

V. S. Pritchett to Elizabeth Bowen

I haven't done much work during the last ten days. I'm supposed to be on holiday, and holidays have a way of pouring into me ideas which are suspiciously like those famous ideas one claims to have had in the bath—useless fantasies, dramatic recriminations and driftings in a big universal way. I've been "carrying on" with Life, of course; not Life the Absolute but Life, the Christian name, the untidy lady who comes waddling out in the summer, opens her holiday eyes on you and steadies herself on your arm with her warm, nice, boring hands. Her figure is going to pieces, I notice as I get older, her ankles give, her movements are lazy, she is yawning and unpredictable and she does not stop talking. Amiable soul—and such a story attached to her if one really knew!—I have always found it hard to resist her. Anything to drop the pen. And yet an imaginative writer always has to strike his own kind of balance between Life and the real thing—I mean the imagination. What a fortune of hours, minutes and days one spends on her. And how she leads one on.

Last week, for example, she got me to Lichfield. I was staying with a farmer on the Welsh border and he took me fifty miles down A5, your Holyhead road, to see an Agricultural Show. He is an artist and critic: a shire horse breeder and a judge at Shows like this. Lichfield has always stuck in my mind since I read George Fox's *Journal*: "Woe to thee, bloody city of Lichfield." A nice, dull little place in glazed salmony Midland brick with a small, conscientious cathedral there which was wrecked by the Puritans in the Civil War and has the dead hand of the restorer on it. What the politicals destroy in the name of the Higher Something or other, can never

* This is part of a longer correspondence between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham, Greene, and V. S. Pritchett.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be restored, or, worse, can only be restored. I expect you know Lichfield and remember the little square in the middle of the town where there is a plaque on the railings to George Fox; and also an unhappy monument to Dr. Johnson which looks like a depressed artillery memorial done in pudding. What a lucky afterthought it was to put (across the way where the buses stop) a rakish statue of Boswell. I ran away from the Show to have a look at these things and to get a drink. But the Show was the thing. A scene so English, to begin with. Rain. The white marquees, the white painted rails of the ring and the pens, the blocks of parked cars, the queue trailing through the spitting wet and the cold wind to the ice cream tent, the wobbly loudspeaker desperately trying to sell the glut of programs; and, pervading all, the rich smell of animals and the tart smell of rainy grass. In England the grass, the public grass, defeats everything in the end. And then, there were those white bulls dolled up like old gentlemen at a wedding; those creamy cows; those shire horses galumphing like Royalty; the eccentricities of the poultry tent; the queer miniature fowl with their feathers growing the wrong way and their petulant, alcoholic eyes and combs. Well, there it all was; what a distraction! For to see is to start writing in one's head and my head is lumbered up enough as it is. Too much Life. Enviable statues in the square with their eyes turned inward, musing on—what? And then, after the cattle, the people, the gaitered, the white coated, the mackintoshed, those bustling farming families,—people, the public, society.

And, of course, my mind was dragged on to the thought of other crowds like this: the yellow-faced swarm that pours out of shipyards, say, at five o'clock, the swarm that traipses Oxford Street, the mad swarms at the greyhound tracks; and then on to other swarms, more sinister, the newspaper swarms—twenty million threatened with starvation in India; the rival swarms in China; the swarms of Jews protesting in New York; and the dreadful swarms in the prison camps of Spain, Russia, Palestine, India; the enormous swarms of the starved, the drowned, the killed of the war. We are surrounded by unimaginable swarms of martyrs and victims. One is a chilled unbelieving outsider before the torpid and agonized crowds of the earth. What am I going to write about—the crowds or the outsider, myself, who hates them. For I do detest the amorphous and indistinguishable.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is, I know, a humbling consolation of a strange kind in the knowledge that to other people I am an undistinguishable part of a herd too. Statistically, my name goes into hundreds of categories and I crop up in every column of the human ledger. I find pleasure, even freedom from responsibility, in the common warmth. But when I go to my room and start writing, my repugnancies rise again, and I split into several frames of mind. If anyone asks me what is my relation, not as a private person but as an imaginative writer to the herds, to society which nowadays has come to mean the whole world —I am bewildered. Not because I haven't one or two slick answers ready to questions like that; but because I have noticed that my opinion appears to differ from my practice. It is natural for an Englishman to be hypocritical; the climate calls for the blur and stimulus of hypocrisy as it calls for alcohol. I am quite capable of saying that it is the duty of the writer to preach the just handling of these herds, to plunge with a great splosh into the great social and political agonies of our time; and then I will sit down and write novels or stories which show no sign of doing that kind of thing. There is a difference between the believing and the imagining self. When I *am* asked to preach my sermon, I take one discreet step backwards before taking two improvident steps forward. I am astonished at being asked. What on earth do I know about it all? And I resent, too, the attempt to trade on my baser nature which really requires so little encouragement to ascend into the stale regions of "blah," which longs to utter a word which someone will hang on. Oh, to be admitted to "conversations at high level!" Is there, in every imaginative writer, an imperialist, expansionist group, urging him to expand beyond the native frontiers of his knowledge and capacity. I hope so, because I hope I'm not the only one; but what fools writers make of themselves in public life. When I was asked some weeks ago what was the imaginative writer's attitude to "the challenge of our time"—as if I could speak for anyone but myself—these feelings muddle me. I have no doubt it is an interesting question. But it may not be an important one. I notice that I am less of a Hotspur and more of a Falstaff every time I get a challenge. I fancy the imaginative writer must avoid the terms of the publicist like the devil. I know that some—not many, if you look it up—that some imaginative writers have been excellent pamphleteers. In Lichfield, George Fox did not hesitate to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

utter loudly about society when he stood barefooted in the street there. He felt responsible, the fanatical Quaker of the Revolution who hated both parties in it. And society (you remember), the herd, lowed back more kindly I think than he deserved: "George, George, what hast done with thy shoes?" And then across the square slouches that puddingy, porridgy figure of Dr. Johnson who utters at large—and very large—all his life. The tub thumper and the table thumper —vision and opinion were their daily meat; but mark that Fox was not an imaginative writer (though his *Journal* is the work of an imaginative man) but a preacher; and the Doctor was an egotist by affliction. A greater writer than either, vain as a dragon fly, stands across the square with the rain dripping down his coppery back; an exquisite with a lop-sided face, bibulous eyes, turn-up nose—like a pot hook and a wonderfully caddish swagger—Boswell, the fool of an inordinate devotion, the unconscious revolutionary (as Peter Quennell pointed out in his admirable portrait). I doubt if Boswell ever reflected on "the challenge of his time" and we must suppose he never thought much about the relation of the writer to society for, in the eighteenth century, all the great questions had been placed in the pigeon holes. Boswell responded to his time in his own way. And that perhaps is the answer we need, do you think?—that there must be a response?

V. S. Pritchett to Elizabeth Bowen

. . . I reject the argument put up in the 'thirties that, in our revolutionary times, the conditions necessary for imaginative work do not exist and that we must down tools to work for the proper conditions. The conditions are bad and they get worse; but I read today of the extraordinary revival of the art of tapestry in France during the German occupation. I do not remember that Goya stopped painting during the French occupation of Spain. In Russia, where the opinion I have mentioned has, with intervals, prevailed, there appears to have been a long decline in prose literature; though it is also true that the decline from the great age of the Russian novel had begun long before 1917. The argument was really advanced so that we might gang up politically; once we were ganged up, we would be easier to control. But sectarianism is sterilizing. The lesson of the thirties seems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be that writers are saved by what can only be called the sacred instinct of party disloyalty.

Why do I write? That seems to me a fundamental question when I think of what I have been saying in these letters. Many years ago I wrote a story about the X-ray department of a hospital. Lately, a nurse wrote to me and praised me for exposing in this story one of the glaring evils of hospital life and the nursing profession. She said I had done a great public service, etc., etc. I have often been criticized for writing about unworthy people and even unworthy subjects—one of the stock arguments used against story tellers: it was made, of course, against ladies as respectable as the Brontes—so this sudden praise was startling. To be called a reformer, a public benefactor, was delightful. The rewards of middle age! I felt like one who has left a drinking trough in granite to his native town. I lined up beside Charles Dickens, Charles Reade, Thomas Hardy; indeed, when you come to think of it, behind all the English novelists except Jane Austen. I lined up, I say, but with the disquieting sensation that I had no right to be in this particular queue. My correspondent was not wrong: I had undoubtedly exposed an evil; but I had no idea when I wrote that I was doing so; it was not my motive. I recall that all my labor and indeed all my conscience was in the choice of the best words, the best images, the best design for what was in my imagination. It still gives me great pain that the second paragraph of the story contains a bad grammatical error. If any social passion entered into the story, it was of a diffused and personal kind. I have always disliked the way the State and the great institutions house themselves. I dislike the light glossy varnish, the tiles that so often line the walls of the corridors as if the places were some official urinal. I dislike the official disinfectants, the cold dreary fractious voices of the little martinets with a pension and the timeless complacency that goes with it. I pray that I may not die in a Post Office and often fear that I will. All these personal idiosyncrasies derive from the fact that I went to a dozen different elementary schools in my childhood. To me the public libraries, the town halls, the hospitals, the court rooms are the elementary school over again. Mean, bleak, monotonous they were, in my day. In that story, I was writing out of the imaginative deposit left by these things in me by my experience. How strange (and instructive) that my non-purposeful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story should have been thought good propaganda. Evidently a writer's work begins a life of its own after it leaves his hands.

This brings me back, by a long detour, to the question: why do I write? I do not write for the reader, for people, for society. I write for myself, for my own self-regarding pleasure, trying to excel and always failing of the excellence I desire. If no one ever read me, would I write? Perhaps not; but I would not be able to stop writing in my head.

When the inner history of any writer's mind is written, whatever his degree, we find (I believe) that there is a break at some point in his life. At some point he splits off from the people who surround him and he discovers the necessity of talking to himself and not to them. A monologue begins. The most disturbing and satisfying statement of the writer's condition that I can think of is in Baudelaire's poem *Bénédiction*; and many of the opening poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* are glosses on the theme. Even the venal muse—about which I could say a lot—is there. To write is to be naive, and one of the strange pleasures of the solitary monologue is the discovery that one has said aloud to oneself what other people are saying silently. With an unresolved mingling of irony and emotion one utters Baudelaire's hackneyed words: *"Hypocrite lecteur—mon semblable—mon frère."* Yes, by means of its writers a society communicates with itself. The better the writer, the purer the tone of his strange telephone line.

But what a horrible world "society" is. I dislike these abstractions. I am sorry I have used it. Ought I to have just said "people"? I'm not sure, because when I say "society" I mean more than people; I mean people bound together for an end, who are making a future. I see that we may have two voices: the voice of the person we are and the voice of the person we fear or wish to become. On that rather mysterious note—I mean it is mysterious to me—I come to the end of this letter. What do you think?

Elizabeth Bowen to V. S. Pritchett

What *do* I think? About the artist, or imaginative writer, and his or her relation to society. About his, her (your, my) response to the challenge of the times. Yes, it is probably something that we should ask each other. When I am asked by an outside person, a non-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writer, I do not seem to know what the question means. Or rather, I do see that it must mean something, but almost any answer I can put up or give remains almost totally meaningless to me: bluff or patter. The question—put by an outside person—makes a crook of me, and I resent that. I feel inclined to say: "Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies."

But, of course, apart from politeness, one cannot tell intelligent people to go to hell; and the askers of that particular question are intelligent people, who are within their rights. At least I take it they are within their rights: I cannot say with authority what these are, as I do not know exactly what is involved in the being of a full-time intelligent person. I am fully intelligent only when I write. I have a certain amount of small-change intelligence, which I carry round with me as, at any rate in a town, one has to carry small money, for the needs of the day, the non-writing day. But it seems to me that I seldom purely *think*. If I wrote less—I don't mean quantitively, but with less intensity—I might think more; if I thought more I might write less.

Obviously intelligent people are on the increase: education, I suppose. This sounds supercilious. I do not feel supercilious, but I feel slightly frightened—the intelligent people seem to be closing in on the artist like the rats on the selfish bishop who hoarded corn in famine time. We all know what happened to the bishop; they picked his bones white. The rats were in the right; at any rate they were the instruments of vengeance. The bishop was in the wrong; he had been unsocial. But really nobody could call—and as far as I know nobody does call—you or me Bishop Hattos: we don't hoard. Whatever comes in goes out again. We are not, either, bolted and barred granaries; we are combinations of a mill and a bakery. So I really must get rid of that original rat nightmare, and the idea of that closing-in circle of thousands of avid glittering eyes. The worst it boils down to, really, is that people these days have a mania for being shown round factories.

In fact, I suppose there never has been a time (or has there?) when the public in general, at any rate the Anglo-Saxon public, has been kinder to the artist or more conscious of him. That's what intelligence is doing: breeding this clement air. The very least the artist can do is to come across and be rather less taciturn and farouche.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the face of such kindness, one can't be humble enough—I mean, humble enough with regard to people: it is obviously impossible ever to be anything but humble with regard to art, because of the disparity between what could be done and what one does do. For me personally, as a woman, any sort of kindness or being wished well or thought well of is the breath of life. Nor is that need wholly personal, womanish: it exists in the writing part of me too. I was struck by Osbert Sitwell's saying the other day, in *The Scarlet Tree,* that the artist, like the child, makes the best growth, *does* best, in an atmosphere of affection and encouragement. How I agree.

At the same time, you don't think it possible that things these days may be almost too propitious? And that to let this propitiousness invade us mayn't make for a lowering of internal pressure? We must have something to push against. Oh well, one need not worry: we always shall have. I expect the effects of the present pro-art indoctrination are very much more limited than I'm inclined to feel. A healthy animal indifference to art probably is endemic in human nature, in your crowds in the Lichfield marketplace. If anyone on that wet day had been told they were shouldering up a writer, they'd probably have thought: "Lucky to have an indoor job." It's this virgin indifference on the part of the mass of people, this unspoken individual mystery in each one of them, that they don't propose to trade in, that's lovable and infatuating, that makes you and me write novels and stories. One writes *for* the ideal reader, but not about him. At least, I don't, and you don't. One writes, in so many cases, about the man or woman who would throw a crooked glance at your or my page of prose and groan: "What is *this* about?" I doubt—though the analogy on my part may be impertinent—whether, for instance, a Proust character could or would have read Proust. Oh yes, Oriane de Guermantes might have—but with a glance up at the clock, from time to time, to see if it was time yet to go and dress for the ball, alternating with a light sigh: "Ce pauvre Marcel. . . . " Oh yes, and Bloch would have. But how Proust loathed Bloch. Emma Bovary would have dropped asleep over *Madame Bovary* long before she came to anything she could like. But, of course for Flaubert that was half the pleasure—making "uninteresting" people (by which one implies, uninterested people) interesting to himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perhaps one emotional reason why one may write is the need to work off, out of the system, the sense of being solitary and farouche. Solitary and farouche people don't have relationships: they are quite unrelatable. If you and I were capable of being altogether house-trained and made jolly, we should be nicer people, but not writers. If I feel irked and uneasy when asked about the nature of my (as a writer) relation to society, this is because I am being asked about the nature of something that does not, as far as *I* know, exist. May writing, I am prepared to think, may be a substitute for something I have been born without— a so-called normal relation to society. My books *are* my relation to society. Why should people come and ask me what the nature of this relation is? It seems to me that it is the other people, the readers, who should know.

You, I see, say in better words what amounts to the same thing. Or, do you? "At some point, he (the writer) splits off from the people who surround him and he discovers the necessity of talking to himself and not to them. A monologue begins. . . . To write is to be naive and one of the strange pleasures of the solitary monologue is the discovery that one has said aloud to oneself what other people are saying silently." But, of course, your monologue isn't simply a thought-stream; you touch a starter; you set in motion something that never stops (that will never stop so long as a single copy of the story or novel you have written exists) by your "invention" of people who feel, speak, act. You make a society each time you write a story. In fact, you are in closer relation to the characters in the story than you will ever be to anyone in real life. It is this ideal relationship of intimacy and power which is to fascinate those who read. Fascinate, and delude. They expect this capacity for relationship to be extended outside the written page, to them. To, as they put it, society as a whole.

Actually, isn't it a directive that you seem to give? That you give in writing? And, also, shape. Shape is possibly *the* important thing. Obsessed by shape in art, you and I may forget the importance of shape in life. It could be that your and my non-writing lives are simply margins around the non-stop story, that we are focused internally on writing. But I shouldn't wonder if it were the shape, essentially, that the reader, the mass, the public goes to the story for. The idea of the possibility of shape is not only magnetic, it's salutary.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shapelessness, lack of meaning, and being without direction is most people's nightmare, once they begin to think—and more and more people are beginning to think, clearly. Of course all thought has a tinge of emotionality: it may be greater, it may be less. The pure thinker, capable of thinking without regard to himself, is, I imagine, rare. Isn't the average thinker simply trying to trace out some pattern around himself? Or, to come on, detect, uncover a master-pattern in which he has his place? To the individual, the possibility that his life should be unmeaning, a series of in the main rather hurting fortuities, and that his death should be insignificant, is unbearable. Temporarily, for the reader (or the listener to music, or the looker at pictures) art puts up a buttress against that—or, still more important, makes a counter-assertion. The very arbitrariness of art brings an odd peace. You and I, by writing a story, impose shape—on fictitious life, it's true, but on life that is real-seeming enough to be familiar and recognizable. Every action or word on the part of any one of the characters in the story has meaning (because it's essential for you and me that it *should* have meaning), and the whole trend of the story suggests direction—it may or may not be a tragic one. Even stories which end in the air, which are comments on or pointers to futility, imply that men or women are too big or good for the futility in which they are involved. Even to objectify futility is something.

And couldn't it be that the wish, the demand for shape is more than individual, that it's a mass thing? Or rather, the mass's wish or demand not to have to go on being a mass merely? The difference between a mass and a society is, I suppose, shape. Yes, you, I see, say: "When I say 'society,' I mean more than people; I mean people bound together by an end, who are making a future." Shape, relation, direction. . . . I can't explore this further; I wish you would. I'm only on the edge of a hazy idea that the artist, in these days, is being sought, focused on—*he* may feel, sometimes, beleaguered—because he seems to be a conferrer of shape, an interpreter of direction? If society, at this moment, in this age, *did* exist—as something conscious, authoritative, explicit and realized—I imagine that the artist would be in a more neglected, but for himself healthier, position. At the moment, he's not simply being asked whether he is, feels himself to be, or should be, in relation with society; he's being asked, implicitly, to create a society to be in relation with. Or—in so far as society is a sensation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as well as a form—to set up in people a sense of society. He seems, from his books, to know the secret: he ought to know how.

Hence, do you think, this demand for journalism about artistry? It obviously must be wanted and will be read, or it would not be commissioned. And the stress is required to be on the social aspect, not the creative one. My view—and, I can see, yours—is that writers should keep out of pulpits and off platforms, and just write. They should not for a moment consider putting their names to petitions or letters to newspapers on matters that they do not know much about and have no reason to know anything about. The temptation to do so is becoming unduly great—why? Obviously, it's a temptation to *amour propre,* but how—I mean, owing to what disordered values and fallacious hopes on the part of the public—does the temptation come to be presented?

All my own discoveries about life have been capricious and inadvertent: I should hesitate to lay down the law about anything. I wouldn't say the same thing about you; but I was fascinated by your story about your story of the X-ray department of the hospital and the nurse who wrote to you. I don't think you and I ought to ignore our own common sense, of which we have the ordinary human modicum. It appears in our writing because it appears in us; but because it is mixed with vision, or whatever else one calls imaginative perception, it sounds Delphic. I could go on about this but had better stop. I meant to shred up the headline about the challenge of our times, but possibly that may come later. Greetings.

Graham Greene to Elizabeth Bowen

(*After reading the three previous letters*)

When your letter came, I had just been reading Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Bronte,* and this sentence from one of Charlotte Bronte's letters recurred to my mind. It certainly represents my view, and I think it represents yours as well: "You will see that *Villette* touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral. Nor can I take up a philanthropic scheme, though I honor philanthropy. . . . "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pritchett, too, I think, would agree with that, though perhaps it was easier for Charlotte Bronte to believe that she had excluded public interest than it is for us. Public interest in her day was surely more separate from the private life: a debate in Parliament, a leading article in the *Thunderer*. It did not so color the common life: with us, however consciously unconcerned we are, it obtrudes through the cracks of our stories, terribly persistent like grass through cement. Processions can't help passing across the end of our imaginary streets: our characters must earn a living: if they don't, what is called a social significance seems to attach itself to their not-earning. Correcting proofs the other day, I had to read some old stories of mine dating back to the early 'thirties. Already they seemed to have a period air. It was not what I had intended.

"The relation of the artist to society": it's a terribly vague subject, and I feel the same embarrassment and resentment as you do when I encounter it. We all have to be citizens in our spare time, standing in queues, filling up income tax forms, supporting our families: why can't we leave it at that? I think we need a devil's advocate in this discussion to explain the whole thing to us. I picture him as a member of the PEN Club, perhaps a little out of breath from his conference in Stockholm where he has been discussing this very subject (in prewar times he would have returned from the Adriatic---conferences of this kind were never held where society was exactly *thick*) Before sitting down to add his signature to an appeal in *The Times* (in the 'thirties it would have proudly appeared with Mr. Forster's, Mr. Betrand Russell's and perhaps Miss Maude Royden's), he would find an opportunity to tell us what society is and what the artist.

I'm rather glad, all the same, we haven't got him with us. His letters confirmed the prejudice I felt against the artist (there the word is again) indulging in public affairs. His letters—and those of his co-signatories—always seemed to me either ill-informed, naive or untimely. There were so many petitions in favor of the victims of arbitrary power which helped to knot the noose round the poor creatures' necks. So long as he had eased his conscience publicly in print, and in good company, he was not concerned with the consequences of his letter. No, I'm glad we've left him out. He will, of course, review us. . . .

We had better, however, agree on our terms, and as you have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suggested no alternative to Pritchett's definition of society—"people bound together for an end, who are making a future"—let us accept that. Though I'm not quite happy about it. We are each, however anarchistically and individually, making a future, or else the future, as I prefer to think, is making us—the death we are each going to die controlling our activities now, like a sheepdog, so that we may with least trouble be got through that gate. As for "people bound together for an end," the phrase does, of course, accurately describe those unfortunate prisoners of the French revolution of whom Swinburne wrote in *Les Noyades*: they were flung, you remember, naked in pairs into the Loire, but I don't think Pritchett had that incident consciously in mind.

The artist is even more difficult to define: in most cases only time defines him, and I think for the purposes of this argument we should write only of the novelist, perhaps only of the novelist like ourselves, for obviously Wells will be out of place in any argument based on, say, Virginia Woolf. The word artist is too inclusive: it is impossible to make generalizations which will be true for Van Gogh, Burke, Henry James, Yeats and Beethoven. If a man sets up to be a teacher, he has duties and responsibilities to those he teaches, whether he is a novelist, a political writer or a philosopher, and I would like to exclude the teacher from the discussion. In the long run we are forced back to the egotistical "I": we can't shelter behind the great dead. What in *my* opinion, can society demand of *me?* What have I got to render to Caesar?

First I would say there are certain human duties I owe in common with the greengrocer or the clerk—that of supporting my family if I have a family, of not robbing the poor, the blind, the widow or the orphan, of dying if the authorities demand it (it is the only way to remain independent: the conscientious objector is forced to become a teacher in order to justify himself). These are our primitive duties as human beings. In spite of the fashionable example of Gauguin, I would say that if we do less than these, we are so much the less human beings and therefore so much the less likely to be artists. But are there any special duties I owe to my fellow victims bound for the Loire? I would like to imagine there are none, but I fear there are at least two duties the novelist owes—to tell the truth as he sees it and to accept no special privileges from the state.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I don't mean anything flamboyant by the phrase "telling the truth": I don't mean exposing anything. By truth I mean accuracy—it is largely a matter of style. It is my duty to society not to write: "I stood above a bottomless gulf" or "going downstairs, I got into a taxi," because these statements are untrue. My characters must not go white in the face or tremble like leaves, not because these phrases are clichés but because they are untrue. This is not only a matter of the artistic conscience but of the social conscience too. We already see the effect of the popular novel on popular thought. Every time a phrase like one of these passes into the mind uncriticized, it muddies the stream of thought.

The other duty, to accept no privileges, is equally important. The kindness of the State, the State's interest in art, is far more dangerous than its indifference. We have seen how in time of war there is always some well-meaning patron who will suggest that artists should be in a reserved class. But how, at the end of six years of popular agony, would the artist be regarded if he had been reserved, kept safe and fattened at the public expense, too good to die like other men? And what would have been expected of him in return? In Russia the artist *has* belonged to a privileged class: he has been given a better flat, more money, more food, even a certain freedom of movement: but the state has asked in return that he should cease to be an artist. The danger does not exist only in totalitarian countries. The bourgeois State, too, has its gifts to offer to the artist—or those it regards as artists, but in these cases the artist has paid like the politician in advance. One thinks of the literary knights, and then one turns to the plain tombstones with their bare *hic jacets* of Mr. Hardy, Mr. James and Mr. Yeats. Yes, the more I think of it, that is a duty the artist unmistakably owes to society—to accept no favors.

Perhaps the greatest pressure on the writer comes from the society within society: his political or his religious group, it may even be his university or his employers. It does seem to me that one privilege he can claim, in common perhaps with his fellow human beings, but possibly with greater safety, is that of disloyalty. I met a farmer at lunch the other day who was employing two lunatics; what fine workers they were, he said; and how loyal. But of course they were loyal; they were like the conditioned beings of the brave new world. Disloyalty is our privilege. But it is a privilege you will never get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

society to recognize. All the more necessary that we who can be disloyal with impunity should keep that ideal alive.

If I may be personal, I belong to a group, the Catholic Church, which would present me with grave problems as a writer if I were not saved by my disloyalty. If my conscience were as acute as M. Mauriac's showed itself to be in his essay *God and Mammon,* I could not write a line. There are leaders of the Church who regard literature as a means to one end, edification. That end may be of the highest value, of far higher value than literature, but it belongs to a different world. Literature has nothing to do with edification. I am not arguing that literature is amoral, but that it presents a personal moral, and the personal morality of an individual is seldom identical with the morality of the group to which he belongs. You remember the black and white squares of Bishop Blougram's chess board. As a novelist, I must be allowed to write from the point of view of the black square as well as of the white: doubt and even denial must be given their chance of self-expression, or how is one freer than the Leningrad group?

Catholic novelists (I would rather say novelists who are Catholics) should take Newman as their patron. No one understood their problem better or defended them more skilfully from the attacks of piety (that morbid growth of religion). Let me copy out the passage. It really has more than one bearing on our discussion. He is defending the teaching of literature in a Catholic university:

> I say, from the nature of the case, if Literature is to be made a study of human nature, you cannot have a Christian Literature. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man. You may gather together something very great and high, something higher than Literature ever was; and when you have done so, you will find that it is not Literature at all.

And to those who, accepting that view, argued that we could do without Literature, Newman went on:

> Proscribe (I do not merely say particular authors, particular works, particular passages) but Secular Literature as such; cut out from your class books all broad manifestations of the natural man; and those manifestations are waiting for your pupil's benefit at the very doors of your lecture room in living and breathing substance. . . . Today a pupil, tomorrow a member of the great world: today confined to the Lives of the Saints, tomorrow thrown upon Babel. . . . You have refused him the masters of human thought, who would in some sense have educated him because of their incidental corruption. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul Valéry

THE ANGEL

A kind of angel was sitting at the edge of a pool. Looking in at himself, he saw that he was Man and in tears, and he was astonished extremely at his appearance in the naked water, a prey to infinite sorrow.

* * *

(Or, if you will, it was Sorrow in the form of Man, unable to find its cause in the clear sky.)

* * *

The face, which was his, and the grief painted on it seemed to him not to belong together. An appearance so miserable stirred and in vain questioned his spiritual substance marvelously pure.

* * *

"O Misery," *he said;* "what part of me are you?"

* * *

He tried to smile at himself; he wept. This treachery of his face confounded his perfect intelligence; and the peculiar look he observed, surely an accidental effect upon his features, an expression upon them so unequal to the universality of his limpid awareness, mysteriously wounded his unity.

* * *

"I have no cause to weep," *he said,* "and in fact cannot have."

* * *

The Movement of his Reason within the light of his eternal stillness felt an unknown question suspend its infallible operation, for that which causes grief in our inaccurate natures creates only a question in absolute essences—whereas, for us, every question is or will be grief.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who is this, then, that loves himself so much he is in torment?" *he said.* "I understand all things, and yet I see that I can suffer. This face is surely my face, these tears my tears. . . . And yet, am I not that power of transparence in whom this face, these tears, and their cause, and whatever might dissipate that cause, are only imperceptible motes of duration?"

* * *

But it was of no avail that these thoughts arose and spread throughout the fullness of the sphere of thought, that similitudes responded to each other, that contrasts declared themselves and were resolved, and that the miracle of clarity was accomplished over and over, and all Ideas sparkled in the light of each idea, like the jewels they are in the crown of unitive knowledge; still nothing like a wrong appeared in his faultless sight, nothing to explain the distress on his face and the tears he saw through his tears.

* * *

"My pure part," *he said,* "the Intelligence that with no effort consumes all created things, without in turn being affected or altered by any of them, cannot recognize itself in this face wet with weeping, in these eyes whose light, of which they are composed, is somehow damped by the humid imminence of tears.

"And how can it be that this fine weeping creature who is in me, and of me, can suffer so? For after all, I see all that he is, myself being knowledge of all things, and one can suffer only from something one does not know.

"O astonishing Head," *he said,* "charming, sorrowful Head, it is true, then, that there is something else than light?"

* * *

And he questioned himself in the universe of his spiritual substance marvelously pure, where all Ideas were living, equidistant from each other and from himself, and in such perfection of harmony and promptitude of responses that one could almost believe he might himself vanish, and yet the system of their simultaneous necessity, sparkling like a diadem, subsists by itself alone in its sublime plenitude.

* * *

And for an eternity he did not cease to know and not to understand.

(*Translated by Jackson Matthews*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Horace Gregory

IN GEORGE SAND'S GARDEN

Someone remarked:
"The indecorous lady is no longer there,
Pursued by young and all too faithful lovers;
The print of small feet and the hooves of deer or 'satyrs'
Is not to be discerned among the grasses."
Nor are there signs, among bruised leaves, torn branches,
Of the encounter, almost breathless, and the fall,
As if into earth's center where the subtle movement
Of the sea is distinctly felt and promises of love
Are overheard among ferns, vines and a sheltering wall
Of roses.

She was neither all heat nor cold:
Her fires were gathered from the autumnal light
Of the Moon in her first quarter who seems to walk
Between and above the trees in early evening—
And are as public as the Moon,
As quickly turned from cloud-washed gold to silver.
What changeable colors, fragrances, river-like sounds
And glances entered and vanished
In the illusion of her eyes, of limbs and shoulder,
Of dress and nakedness, and in the green-reflected
Disquiet of her hair.

Even when one saw her
Stride like a man, heard her voice crack,
And knew her veins were filled with fluid that was not blood,
Was deftly poured, as in a wine-glass, for many palates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To taste its salt, to count the beating of her heart
Against the lips, and knew her action
Had less art in it than the command of mind and will—
Even then, among her "rash *sorties,*" the perversions
Of taste, mind, feeling, a less and more
Than human spirit caused a trembling of the leaves,
Sat for the camera, smoking a cigar,
And at the center of a room, draped in soiled linen,
Advised by unpaid physicians and counselors-at-law,
Remained serene.

Was this, then,
"The Eternal Feminine?" life in short death that "makes us
What we were before?" a metamorphosis
From sex to sex?—so she was read,
Gazed at, applauded, and half, but only half
Forgotten.

And in her garden, serenity
Is in the summer afternoon, in *"nature morte,"*
The trimmed lawn, the white and empty marble garden seat,
In skies that open with a blue and vacant stare.
In the sun-dial, in the distant vista through the trees,
Is the lady there?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stephen Spender

THE LIFE OF LITERATURE*

When I was fifteen or sixteen, I was staying in Marden, Kent, at the house of my uncle, J. A. Spender. One morning my uncle announced that a poet was coming to tea. This poet was Frank Kendon, then quite a young man. The announcement filled me with a spiritual excitement which I can analyze rather than describe. Of Mr. Kendon's work I knew a long poem, *Judas Iscariot,* the opening of which, if I remember rightly, describes an early meeting of Judas in his boyhood, with a snake, amid sun-bright stony Palestinian scenery (my memory of the poem may be inaccurate, but the point here is to be faithful to my own impression). The rest of the poem tired me, but I did not blame Mr. Kendon for this. In those days I found it difficult to sustain my interest in a long poem. If I could not follow a poem, I assumed there was something wonderful in it beyond my comprehension.

So Mr. Kendon was for me a maker of crystalline miracles, a lord in the realm of the imagination, where above all things, I longed to have a humble existence. To write one line, or, at most, one poem, which was really "poetry" and which might appear in print, an object which produced the ravishing sensation of something concretely made with words, like a branch of coral extended in the mind of the reader—that was my highest ambition.

Mr. Kendon also represented a life of liberty to me from the chains which I vaguely felt to fret the life of my uncle. When, for example, my uncle, blowing out his small white moustache a little and leaning back in his armchair, or on one of those long walks where I watched with fascination the perspiration at the back of his neck melt away the starch of his white collar: when he said: "Poetry! Well, when I was your age I also used to make charming little pat-

* This is a chapter from an autobiographical work in progress.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terns of words which fascinated me, but of course that was in Latin, which was more difficult. Believe me, I would still like to write something purely literary, if I had the time and leisure to amuse myself in that way. But you see," glancing at my prodigious aunt May, "I have to sing for my supper." When my uncle spoke in this way, he seemed to me like a benevolent gaoler, his drawing room groaned with invisible chains, and my little secret ambition suddenly seemed like a bomb concealed in the room, timed to go off in a few years, while I longed to say: "But for me poetry is not just a game of words. I want to be a poet." And looking round his room with all the heavy furniture, the framed water colors, the chests and silks ransacked from her beloved "the East," by Aunt May, I felt like crying out what I still believe to be a real question (though now it turns against myself): "Why, if you can create something 'literary,' do you have to 'sing for your supper'? Why don't you live in a garret and be neglected and starve, so long as a line, a poem, may be remembered for a hundred years?"

Kendon, my uncle had told me, *was* poor and neglected. "A poet is lucky today if he sells five hundred copies of a slim volume of verses." And then my uncle would go on to say that the public was not to blame for this neglect of the moderns, because none of them was "great." They were all "petits maitres," not to be compared with Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, who, in their heyday, sold in tens of thousands. And if some modern poet, such as that young fellow T. S. Eliot, attempted to write verse which was not all about skylarks, then he only succeeded in being fashionable. "And believe me, in my time, I have seen any number of literary fashions become the talk of the town and then fade away."

But my uncle could not discourage me. Indeed, neglect, starvation, cliqueiness, marrying actresses and modernism—all the detrimental attributes of poets in the minds of my uncle and aunt—so far from damping my enthusiasm seemed secret clues leading to the life of fame which I desired.

When Frank Kendon came, I could only look at him. He had (I think) sandy hair over an unassuming face, and he was dressed in tweeds. He sat quietly in a chair, did not look at me, and ate cake. He was very silent and my uncle had to question him to get him to talk at all. When he did talk, it was to discuss literary life in London.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The names of Jack Squire, De la Mare, John Freeman, thrilled through the drawing room, but not, as I imagined them, like kingfishers and humming-birds, but somewhat banally, like ordinary people, in terms of what they were doing, whom they were seeing, how they were making a living. They were mostly doing, seeing and earning in ways which seemed to me rather unpoetic.

But my uncle had now a more sensitive perception than I of the poetic yearning which underlay Kendon's remarks, and, still more, his long silences: the yearning of the young literary man to get away from here, to get to London. My uncle knew all the men of whom Kendon spoke, for when he had edited the *Westminster Gazette,* he had published their poems in corners of the weekly edition of that newspaper, *The Saturday Westminster,* and he had given them reviewing work with which they supplemented the few guineas they earned from their verses. The attitude of my uncle to these poets was rather that which some great city station master, responsible for the trains going to all parts of the world, might have, supposing that in the neighborhood of the station there were a strange breed of railwaymen who insisted on devoting their lives to shunting the smallest trains exclusively in little side-lines: as one who thought in terms of the largest traffic extended over the largest world he would feel surprised at such an attitude, but at the same time he would have an uneasy half-envious feeling that there was a certain purism about these lovers of their little engines. He might also arrange, (as did my uncle, with *The Saturday Westminster*) to develop a little nucleus of lines devoted to pure shunting, doling out some of the shareholders' money to these purists, and at the same time strangely perturbed (especially after listening for forty years to the opinions of Aunt May) by certain irregularities in their morals.

He himself when he first went into journalism had contrived never to earn less than ten pounds a week, which was a considerable sum in the 'eighties. Even so he had to spend four years pegging this up to a considerably higher sum before he dared to propose to my Aunt. An example of protracted selectivity which, if one contemplated my aunt, was a two-edged warning: for one could hardly help reflecting that perhaps he should have given himself still longer to choose: or alternatively, that if he couldn't make a better choice in four years, he might as well have lumped my aunt in the first fort-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night. All my uncle's examples acted in a strangely inverse direction on me in my life: so that it was when I thought of Aunt May that I decided to marry my first wife within three weeks of our meeting. Perhaps an equally unwise decision in its way, except that the engagement marriage and all were over within the space of three years.

My uncle had a deep, almost tender sympathy for young poets, and when Frank Kendon was gone, he sighed deeply and said: "How I pity that young man!" "Why?," I asked astonished, for to me the life of Kendon appeared an uninterrupted idyll, and if he had seemed a little melancholy at tea, slighting my uncle (I thought) and not so much as glancing at myself, I assumed this to be because he was fortified in his talent: "Why?" "Because," said my uncle, "He is eating his heart out here in the country, poor young man. He longs to be in the town with his Freemans and Squires and other fry."

I was a little disappointed that Kendon had not looked at me, not even when my uncle had explained to him that this young nephew also fancied himself as a maker of patterns out of words. I had prayed for a sympathetic glance of recognition, I had hoped that he would, while accepting my obeisance, see the halo of my own idea which shone around my head. However, a small incident occurred which reaffirmed my vision of Kendon. For shortly after his visit was ended it so happened that my uncle and I went for a ride in a hired car (my uncle could never afford a car: he hired them at enormous expense) and, just outside Marden, we passed Kendon on the road. When we had rolled by, he stood there in the cloud of our dust, he stood alone in the road, stick in hand, absorbed in his thoughts, and I felt as though his imagination possessed the whole landscape, as though the trees and oasts and hop fields of Kent leaned against his face and entered through his eyes, changing there into a branch of words, like a branch of coral. "He doesn't want a lift. He doesn't want to be disturbed by us. He has his thoughts," said my uncle, and I realized at that moment that he, who had denied his own dreams, could enter into the dreams of others.

In these days, I thought of poetry as the invocation through words of a secret world within the world of actuality. I did not like the poetry of every poet, and only a few poems gave me the sensation which I felt to be poetry, yet I assumed that nearly every poet who had published in the anthology *Poems of Today* was a poet, and that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was my own fault if I did not appreciate quite all the poems in that collection. Often my excitement about the idea of poetry created as it were a poetry beyond the lines themselves, so that words which conveyed little to me in themselves were surrounded by the aura of the idea that others had found them beautiful. For example,

> *Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam*
> *Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn,*

conveyed no clear picture to me. But the idea that they were often quoted as pure poetry illuminated them, and just as, getting out of a boat and seeing a quayside and some houses one can cover over a disappointment by filling one's mind with the thought, "This is France," so when I read these lines, I said to myself: "This is pure poetry."

Some poetry, such as Keats' *Endymion* filled me with awe. I felt that I was in the presence of pure gold which I could not appreciate, except for certain lines, and yet I could see it was gold. Other poetry became, as soon as I had read it, identified with an experience already existing within myself, which, nonetheless I had not known until I read the poetry. In this, poetic language was different from certain religious language, such as The Sermon on the Mount. When I read the Sermon on the Mount, I knew it to be true as though it had been made to fit some truth I knew already in my heart. But this truth existed outside the words of the Sermon, beautiful as they are: it was a truth of experience. With poetry there was the same experience of a poem corresponding to an experience—and yet the experience did not exist outside the words of the poem. When I read certain sonnets of Wordsworth, or Keats, or Shakespeare, I knew them at once as though I had known them before: and yet I had not known them before, as I knew the Christian truth. The inevitability of the words in the poetry had such force that it somehow created in my mind an illusion of its own past history there, as though it had existed long before I experienced it. Probably what one means by "inevitability" in words is a time illusion which a certain order of words produces: that although they strike one as fresh and new they also strike one as though they had been said for as long as one can remember.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Some poetry, which I should have liked, actually repelled me: Milton's *Allegro* and *Il Penseroso,* Gray's *Elegy,* Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,* Dryden's *Odes.* I think that what repelled me about these wonderful achievements, was the sense in each of them of poetry trying to become architecture: of the words aspiring to a structure which often remains outside the poetry. I felt that I had no entry into these great poetical constructions.

Yet these ideas of repulsion and uninterest were felt only as defects of my own mind, they implied no judgment, no criticism. Although I could begin to see that the wholly sentimental and the incompetent were bad, beyond this my mind did not condemn. I appreciated by a process of awareness which put me at the center of a verbal excitement, I failed to appreciate when I had no awareness. This awareness, although uncritical, could make distinctions and perceive differences of quality, as though within my own mind, different poetic experiences lay side by side acting upon each other, the good implicitly burning out the bad. I read every poem in every book and magazine that came my way, and when I came in contact with the moderns, they acted almost chemically upon my passive awareness. I remember the great impression which the quotations in a review in *The Times Literary Supplement* of the poems by T. S. Eliot made upon me, without my in the least knowing why I was being impressed. A sensibility which was contemporary in me had been awakened by a few lines, as though by the pressing of a button.

I liked much that was bad. The young accept the bad, not through bad judgement, but through lack of judgement. They like the good as well as the bad, and they cannot distinguish between an effect which a writer indicates that he is trying to make in his writing and one which is actually made. Thus, although I was conscious of the ravishing beauty of the poems of De la Mare, I thought his virtue lay in a dreamlike atmosphere which he shared with other writers, I did not understand that this very vagueness was produced by effects controlled with as great precision as that with which a watchmaker screws the jewels into a watch. I was deceived by the will to make a thing of beauty which betrays itself in some poems by the use in excess of words such as "beauty." I had only to read in one of Mr. Masefield's poems that he worshipped beauty to think that I was in the presence of the beautiful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet I am grateful even for artistic experiences which I now recognize to have been false, for the false which within a few years time I was to condemn so easily, was actually a form of incomplete worship of true values which inevitably accompanies true worship. Since the young have a strong sense of what is worshipped and little sense of the form or the authenticity of prayer, they may nevertheless be directed by way of the false towards the true to which it in its hypocritical vagueness nevertheless points. For the development of our own values, it is necessary that at a certain age we should be undiscriminating enthusiasts, at another age harsh and abusive judges. Later there comes perhaps a tolerance which is based on disillusion rather than lack of discernment.

Moreover, when I was young, perhaps I had more discrimination than I think. My mind as it were passed over with a certain puzzlement what it could not take, and perhaps there was something delicate in this silent refusal. For example, when I read the line

O world be nobler for her sake,

I merely felt within myself a certain lack of response. I didn't feel, as I would now, that it was rather absurd of Mr. Binyon to invoke the world to be nobler for the sake of Mrs. Binyon, or that perhaps even the world might not be so unworthy of Mrs. Binyon as the line seems to imply. Nor could I go still deeper into the matter and reflect that after all, the emotion, although a little absurd, is genuine, and that it is the expression which is perhaps at fault, the simplicity really being mistaken and tactless, where, if the poet had created a memorable image of a saintly or beautiful woman, then the emotion would arise out of this picture of nobility. As I say, I did not think about all this, and perhaps there was something sacred in my not thinking in this way, which is slightly sacrilegeous.

At this time, until I was twenty, I wrote a good deal of poetry. My attitude towards creating was as indiscriminate as towards reading. I wrote when I was in a mood of vague excitement about some subject which struck me as poetic—usually a tragic one; fatal love, death, the sadness of being young (which struck me very much). There was a whirl of words in my mind. These encountered a series of more or less fatal accidents when they banged against the edges

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of meter and rhyme. If, however, I abandoned meter and rhyme, and wrote free verse, the result was even more fatal, because my poeticisms then became just a continuous flow, with no reason ever for them to stop. In general, I think that one of the advantages of "form" in literature is that it provides the reader with some kind of assurance, other than the mere number of lines and pages, that there are brakes which eventually will bring the thing to a stop at a terminus.

Sometimes, when I had finished a bundle of poems, I would stuff them into an envelope and address it to Mr. J. C. Squire. When they had got to this stage I had lost all confidence in them myself, but I reflected that after all they might be wonderful, and in this case Mr. Squire would know. However, he never replied.

Occasionally I experienced moods of great indignation, especially against my Aunt May. These moods were by no means unjustified, and they had a sound basis, I believe. When both my parents had died, my uncle would, I think, having no children of his own, have been very glad to have us as companions. My aunt who was really, I think, incapable of liking anyone, was specially capable of disliking us, and most of all me. After a brief honeymoon period of our relationship, during which she extracted most of my secrets, she decided that I was doomed to marry an actress, and that the primrose path which would lead to this final immorality was art. She never lost an opportunity of lecturing me on the depravity and wickedness and irresponsibility of artists. Next to artists, she hated Mr. Lloyd George. She was a crude expert at insulting people, and this gift exercised amongst the delicate fissures of the Liberal Party—which my uncle was for ever trying to heal—made her a kind of perambulating human chisel on the occasions of Liberal reunions. She insisted on attending these celebrations, would then push herself forward saying in a loud voice "I want to meet Mr. George," a reference to the fact that the Lloyd George family had tried to add distinction to their name by adding the Lloyd to the George. Having met Lloyd George she would either then shout at the top of her voice: "We meet again, Mr. George," or she would turn her enormous back on him.

She hated any tender human emotion with an intensity only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

understood by the great English novelists. On one occasion, we went to visit some friends of my uncle's at Tonbridge Wells. At this party there happened to be two young people newly married whose feeling for each other was so right, so touching, so vibrant, that it was a presence like music in the room. In the presence of their happiness, I felt the assurance that my own adolescent problems would one day melt away, liquefy in the fusion of a love like theirs where the most sensitive considerateness was inclosed within an underlying passion. The presence of these two young people filled my aunt with a fury which she could not conceal. As soon as she left the hotel she burst out: "How disgusting, how selfish, how horrible. Fancy insulting Alfred by introducing him to those people. Of course, I'm used to every kind of horror after what I went through at the hospital in the war, but Alfred ought to be spared," and so on. To my mind to learn the innocence of those young people was to return to the Garden of Eden: and here she was a horrible perverted British angel with a ferocious bark, making it her business that now that humanity had been shut out no pairs of lovers should slip back by a hidden gate into the Garden.

My aunt often used to take me into another garden—her own—and there, under the pretext of gardening she would spend a solid morning lecturing me on the wickedness of writers with the exception of Robert Louis Stevenson who was supposed to have been one of of her admirers. Stevenson, she would explain with a sigh, was ill he had to go away to a South Sea island, so he could be excused. "Don't choose the *easy* way of Art and Bohemianism. Choose the *difficult* way, as your uncle has done. Of course, if he'd liked he could have been a great cellist, a great poet, or a great painter, and won the empty admiration of the mob, as you are tempted to do, and married some feather-brained actress, as you will do if we aren't all very careful." I must say my aunt's unbridled hatred of the young, the beautiful and the happy, spiced heavily with her rather unaccountable passion for The East, and dark references to her G.S. (meaning Great Sorrow), were enjoyable. She was great at Garden Scenes and early morning Bedroom Scenes, when she would summon me to her room and after explaining to me that she was in bed because the snares which surrounded me had kept her awake all night she would tell me her Night Thoughts on the swamps I was likely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to sink into. After one of these scenes I wrote a poem which begins with lines which capture, I think, a little of her vigor:

Madam, your face half hidden by your hair
Which hung in touselled patterns from the fair
Massively-active flesh, surrounded by great pillows
You were the largest of your bed's huge billows!
Reclining there, incarnate confidence,
You chid me for my lack of competence
In the half-curtained room. Warm shadows fell
Round you, like guardian ghosts. I did not tell
You of them, being sure that you
Would think this an aesthetic thing to do.
And most aesthetic was the mad March wind
Which rashly rapped against the window blind. . . .

It seems to me now that the only work I did of any merit at this time was all written in indignation. But this was not my idea of what poetry should be. I shall now try to describe this because it is as far from anything I could do or have done as from the modernism in which I became plunged afterwards.

My aim was to create a verbal swoon, an enchanting music, an imagery that entranced the senses, a poetry where one completely lost oneself in a world beyond the world of actuality. You look out of a window onto a lawn; beyond the lawn there is a stream running parallel with the house and the horizon, and barring the horizon, rising like a dark pillar whose top is dark against a round fire—the moon—is a poplar tree whose leaves, absorbent of the darkness, seem soaked in music. In short lines, with unnoticed subtle rhyming, you convey this in your poem which is light on mind and ear. My aim in poetry was the extension within imagery of the great 'O' of a pure invocation.

Once, many years after this, when I was travelling in Greece, I dined out of doors at a restaurant on an island in the bay of Chalchis. The tables were under the stars, and a few yards from them there lay the flapping black flag of the sea, beyond which in a ring all round the waters stood the ring of the mountains transparent with a stillness like awareness of the whole past. At the table

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next to me sat a young Englishman—whose face I could not see—and with him a girl. After we had eaten, this young man suddenly pushed his chair back from the table and without the least affectation, looking up at the stars, recited lines which began with a great "O," which some vague recollection from my school days told me were the address of the Watchman to the night in the *Agamemnon*. I did not understand these lines, but the Greek words in the young English voice were filled with the stars, the seas and the mountains. This is the poetic effect I am trying to describe, an invocation in a language which one understands incompletely, filled with the stars and the mountains.

Thus when I went to Oxford I was in a state of literary innocence. I quickly realized that my lack of judgment was not only a wrong view of literature but also a social error which embarrassed those whom I met. For example, I disgraced myself at a luncheon party of literary undergraduates by giving terribly wrong answers to two questions. The first: "What novel are you reading?" which I answered "*Martin Arrowsmith,* by Sinclair Lewis." "Oh, do you like Sinclair Lewis?" someone said in an icy voice. This was a rhetorical question, followed by another probe: "And what poetry are you reading?" "*Requiem,* by Humbert Wolfe." After this no one spoke to me. My first year at Oxford was distinctly a social failure.

I did not get to know Auden until the end of that year, as until then the various people who might have introduced us did not think me worthy of the honor. The man who introduced me finally to Auden was Christopher Bailey, a scientist with a great interest in music and a puzzled attitude towards "literary men," who had been at school with Auden. Bailey was a scholar with a brilliant inventiveness. His rooms were always littered with scientific apparatus amongst musical scores, the works of James Joyce and beer bottles. He made electric pick-up gramophones long before such things were on the market. He was always kind to me, though he kept me firmly in my place. Once when I showed him a poem he handed it back with a quizzical smile on his rather bear-like face, and said: "Your typewriting has definitely improved." He frightened me about Auden, telling me that even to go into his room and look at the books gave one a "sense of inferiority." Auden's library included books on psy-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chology, philosophy and science as well as literature in several languages.

The legend of Auden at Oxford is so confused in my mind with the real Auden, that I can scarcely distinguish the two. I have known Auden for twenty years and it is only in the last year, when seeing him in America, that I could understand him in at all the same way as I understand other people. There is, as a matter of fact, something really puzzling about Auden, and I think this is his ability to organize his attitudes on a great many subjects at a given time to a far greater degree than most people, and to do so intelligently. Although he is extremely intelligent, this is not just intelligent: it is extraordinary. I can explain what I mean by contrasting the ordinary with the extraordinary. Most people—even very intelligent people have a quality of ordinariness about them: one feels that they are uncertain: this is what makes them "ordinary." To be puzzled, not to know one's way in life, not to know what use to make even of one's knowledge, to be unsure about the meaning of life and what one's purpose should be in this world: that is the ordinary human condition, which is, indeed the situation within which most of the world's literature, including the greatest, has been written. What is extraordinary is to be clear-sighted about and in complete control of all the elements of one's life, to fit them all into a single intellectual purpose, to be able to relate the life around one and the ideas of others to a pattern which one has invented for oneself, without doubts or uncertainties. Auden has always had to a remarkable degree this capacity to think of everything and everyone as a cipher within a pattern which he has invented to explain life in his own mind. He also has a remarkable gift for inventing the most inclusive imagery to explain how the different factors which he observes round him fit into the general pattern which he sees so clearly. His genius, of course, lies more in the inventing of the images than in the creation of the pattern itself, which changes and which often seems arbitrary and rather impatiently improvised.

Auden's talent is of course the opposite of the romantic. The romantic thrives on doubts and uncertainties, on what Keats called "negative capability," he makes a virtue out of being a victim of the immensity of the universe and the darkness in which he is lost, and then exercises a kind of magical power in inventing huge images

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—whose hugeness really lies not in his power over them but in their power over him in his helplessness. Probably the romantic, who is a child in the dark in his creating is nearer the heart of humanity than the anti-Romantic because we are all ultimately children in the dark. But here I am only concerned with saying that Auden is extraordinary. He has a great grasp of seeing experiences as illustrations of an abstract pattern. In this respect the only person I have met who compares with him is André Malraux who uses his intelligence with the same purposiveness: to relate everything to the pattern which at some phase of his own development becomes the whole of life for him.

At Oxford the legendary Auden was somewhat crude, if it is true that he kept on his mantelpiece a decaying orange, quite mildewed where it faced the wall, in order to remind himself of the *fate of the West*; *and in his desk a loaded revolver always ready for* the clinical end which, if he decided life was a failure, he would accomplish without a qualm. He also had a reputation for a certain ruthlessness in his behavior to other undergraduates. What to me was most terrifying was the way in which those, like Gabriel Carritt, who knew him well would say "Really Auden is very kind and quite simple."

At the age of twenty-one, Auden had a very clear sense of his potentialities and an idea of the influence he could exercise on the people around him. He had a picture of an intellectual and literary landscape into which he would move as soon as the temporary convenience of his life at Oxford was over.

I first met him at a luncheon where he snubbed me. Probably he did this because my manner was extremely embarrassing. To my surprise after this meal he invited me, in a few days' time to call on him. One did not drop in on Auden. His particular type of affectation at Oxford was excessive control of every moment of his day. When I went in, he was seated with a lamp at his elbow, so that the light was directed at me and he was in darkness. He looked up rather abruptly, told me to sit down, and began to question me. I told him that I had read a poem of his recently in one of the Oxford magazines and that I liked it very much. "What did you like about it?" he asked disconcertingly. I said: "I liked the climatic part," by which I meant to be saying, rather obliquely that I liked the climax. "What do you mean, the 'climatic' part?" he asked, "That interests me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What was there in it about the climate?" Of course, I could not explain my mistake. I was embroiled in the kind of conversational impasse which becomes classic when I try to carry on a conversation with any of the Huxley family, but I could not extricate myself then. Auden looked down his nose and himself changed the conversation, asking me what poets I liked. He was extremely definite about whom he liked, and after hearing my reply would say "Yes," "No good," "Can't hold a pen," "Up the wrong pole." He ended by saying that the literary scene was hopeless, and it was evident that poetry was waiting for Someone.

As I was leaving him I took from a shelf a book called *The Making of Americans,* by Gertrude Stein. "Is this any good?" I asked. "Tripe," Auden answered, "I'll sell it to you for fifteen shillings," and he seemed quite to expect me, on that recommendation, to buy it.

Once, in these early days, I felt so utterly stupid when I was with Auden that I asked him straight out whether he thought I was any good. He looked at me strangely, and said: "Of course, you're some good." "Why?" "Because you are enormously humiliated." He paused a moment and then said in his rather self-consciously icy tones: "All literature springs from humiliation." Later on the same day, he said: "You mustn't write anything but poetry. We need you for poetry."

When Auden talked he often used the word "Symptomatic." The philosophy of Whitehead, the neurosis of some friend, the Oxford gasworks, might all equally be "symptomatic." A poem to be good in our time must also be "symptomatic," it must show "contemporary sensibility." Another word he often used was "clinical." The poet's attitude must be absolutely detached, like that of a surgeon or a scientist. I think that Cocteau's image in *Orphée* of Death as the surgeon with white coat and rubber gloves was his secret fantasy of the poet. Then the poet must be "the ordinary man," if possible dressed "like a bank clerk." But no one dressed less or looked less like a bank clerk than Auden himself.

Auden had enormous vitality, and this means that he was infectiously amusing in a rather buffoonish way. He was not witty in the Gallic way. His humor lay in the expansiveness of his personality, his uninhibited freedom from the fears and prejudices which weigh on many people, and a capacity to parody himself. In the last analysis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he did not take anything seriously: for him living consisted of a collection of objects: objects of behavior, material objects, persons, and the interest of these lay in a mental pattern which he could make out of them. He could not take the objects themselves seriously, and in a sense he could not take the pattern seriously either. Perhaps seriousness only lay in the spirit which could make the pattern. It is this lack of seriousness which has most disconcerted some of Auden's admirers, particularly his American ones. They want art to be serious all through, like they might want a golden calf to be made of solid gold.

Auden's style of dressing eccentrically, eating enormously, running the lives (particularly the sexual lives) of his fellow undergraduates, was also carried to the point of absurdity. Sometimes one had the impression that he was running a clinic for distributing information on the facts of life, by special interview, whilst he was as Oxford. He had a clownish, albino appearance which gave an impression of lashlessness and hairlessness, thick lips, a mole on one cheek, a habit of jerking his head up authoritatively, a rather flabby physique. He used to say in his clinical voice that he would make a good actor because he had a face of putty, and that the rest of his physique was "designed for vice." He smoked enormously.

Most of the stories about him illustrate his enormous self-confidence, his clowning, and his affectation of a certain caddishness whilst he was at the University, which later gave way to a studied determination to "love everybody." A story is told by his Oxford tutor, Nevill Coghill, that one day he came late for a tutorial to find that Auden had already arrived. Auden was seated at his desk reading Coghill's letters, with a frown of serious myopic concentration. When Coghill had come in, Auden looked up and said: "Good, you're here. What have you done with the second page of this letter?," holding up the first page in his hand. On another occasion Auden went to tea with the family of a don who lived on Boars Hill near Oxford. In the middle of tea, he got up hastily and poured the contents of his cup out of the window. His hostess looked at him inquiringly and said: "Is my tea all right, Mr. Auden?" Auden replied in his most clinically analytic voice: "Tepid urine," and resumed his place at tea.

Auden had an extraordinary intonation. He spoke underlining, selecting, and holding out, as it were on metaphorical pincers, certain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

words or syllables of words, with a mocking portentousness, an extravagant impersonality. He could say something quite usual such as "It's very *cold,*" with an emphasis on the word "cold" which set me shivering and laughing.

He read his own poems in a voice which curiously mingled clinical lack of expression with his singling out of words and syllables. It was impossible to understand a whole poem read in this way, yet certain lines stand out in the memory, for example:

The heel upon the finishing blade of grass.

I was too over-awed by him to feel confidence in our relationship. I always had a clear idea that there were others whom he cared for more than for me, some for their intelligence, some for their charm. With most of my friends at this time, my relationships existed in a kind of No Man's Land where I happened to be, outside all their other relationships. Despite all this, I had the pleasure of knowing that Auden took me seriously as a writer, and in a way which I could not explain to myself, even respected my personality. One day I showed him a story which I had written when I was seventeen in Switzerland (it afterwards appeared in *By the Lake*). When I next came to see him, he suddenly said: "This is pure poetry." "What?" I asked. "Listen," and he recited:

> His whole life had probably been a pilgrimage to this moment. Or rather, if not his whole life, one portion of it, divided into sections: little closed-in beads of lust running on a chain of days and weeks through years. Till now, that which had been furtive, cried to be let out, would burst its way through.

"Who wrote that? You did." Read out in Auden's voice, the words had seemed strangely unfamiliar, and yet he had extracted that which was most important in them: the image, followed all the way through of the chain of beads which were also spermatozoa. Now when I saw my own creation transformed through the medium of his mind, I felt the ecstasy and relief which a writer feels on very rare occasions when he sees his words in print: the letters are a dance, a forest of dark trees, a row of sentinels on the glossy page: and with a warm flush of the blood against his face he knows there was a moment when he was justified.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Next day we went on a picnic. Auden told me now that he had quite changed his mind about my work. I should not write poetry but prose narrative.

He walked very fast on flat feet with striding angular movements of his arms and legs and jerkings up of his head. Once he had been told by a doctor that he must walk as little as possible, so he immediately began going for thirty mile walks. He had a theory at this time that the body is controlled by the mind, and he could explain a headache, a cold or a sore throat in what are now called "psychosomatic" terms.

We came to the open country, crossed fields, ate from our luncheon baskets and lay down on the grass. Auden talked about the poet. "In a revolution, the poet lies on his belly on the top of a roof and shoots across the lines at his best friend who is on a rooftop of the other side." "Of course, at heart, secretly, the poet's sympathies are always with the Enemy," he added darkly, "because he so hates the idea of there being sides and propaganda that he inevitably must hate most the side of which he hears and sees most, namely his own. . . . When he is in love, the poet always prays that his loved one will die. He thinks more of the poem that he will write than of the beloved. . . . The tragic, at its best, is always funny: "Enter LEAR with CORDELIA dead in his arms. LEAR: Howl, howl, howl, howl!" Or that scene in *War and Peace* where Pierre rushes into the burning building to save a baby and the baby tunrs and bites him." Later on he told me that I must stop being "the Mad Shelley stuff. The poet is far more like Mr. Everyman than like Shelley and Keats. He cuts his hair short, wears spats a bowler hat and a city suit, and goes to the job in the Bank in the suburban train."

And so on . . . . I realize now that such lectures by one young man to another, with their mixture of sense and nonsense, fun and portentousness, malice and generosity, compose a secret language between a circle with a leader, the Witches' Brew from which a literary movement is made.

It happened that day to be a very fine afternoon of high summer when the trees in their massive foliage under the immense and still light were like very old walls and tumuli. The shadows between the branches were so motionless that they seemed crevices between stones. And across endless, green and yellow fields like glass, these walls of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trees stretched across England, from Oxfordshire as far as the castles of Wales and Gloucestershire. The whole West was below us.

After this, Auden came to stay with me during the summer vacation in London. There he was amusing, extravagant, tyrannical, happy or complaining. I felt much more at ease with him, but somehow the lack of confidence which undermined all my relationships until I was thirty years old, returned. After he had left London, Auden got very ill. Applying his own theories very ruthlessly to this illness, he ignored it and went for a long bicycle ride at a time when he should have been in hospital. He nearly killed himself, and had to have a serious operation. After this, he left Oxford and went to Germany, while I returned to the University for my last year.

(*To be continued in the next issue*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Chase

DISSENT ON BILLY BUDD

Melville's last book, a short novel written between 1888 and 1891 and called *Billy Budd, Foretopman,* has generally been praised for qualities it does not possess. It is natural, of course, to wish to see in this book the last ripe word of the aged Melville. And there has been a great temptation to see in *Billy Budd,* as one writer says, Melville's final "testament of acceptance"—his final acceptance of a "tragic" view of life involving an apotheosis of the common man as Christ and an assertion that what is needed in American life is a leavening of individualism and law by the sympathetic passions of the heart. And *Billy Budd* is said to be Melville's definitive moral statement. But it is my impression that Melville made his definitive moral statement in *Moby Dick, The Confidence Man,* and *Clarel,* and that the moral situation in *Billy Budd* is deeply equivocal.

In Melville's writing there move through the consciousness of Ishmael two basic kinds of hero, both akin, in their several variations, to the central figure of Prometheus. The first kind of hero is the false Prometheus, who in one way or another violates the deep-running natural and psychic rhythms of life which are necessary for all creative enterprise. The second kind of hero is the Handsome Sailor: the true hero in whom Prometheus tends to put on the full tragic manhood of Oedipus. This second kind of hero is briefly sketched or symbolized in *Typee* as Marnoo, in *White-Jacket* as Jack Chase, in *Moby Dick* as Bulkington, and in *Israel Potter* as Ethan Allen. In each case, he is a full-statured man, great in body, heart, and intellect, a man with great pain of experience behind him, a young man, but still so fully created a man that, in the case of Jack Chase, Ishmael is moved to call him "sire."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In *Billy Budd,* the handsome Sailor is once again symbolized:

> In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now, a stroller along the docks of any considerable seaport would occasionally have his attention arrested by a group of bronzed marines, man-of-war's men or merchant sailors in holiday attire ashore on liberty. In certain instances, they would flank, or, like a bodyguard, quite surround some superior figure of their own class, moving along with them like Aldebaran among the lesser lights of his constellation. That signal object was the "Handsome Sailor" of the less prosaic time, alike of the military and merchant navies. With no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him, rather with the offhand unaffectedness of natural regality, he seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates. A somewhat remarkable instance recurs to me. In Liverpool, now half a century ago I saw under the shadow of the great dingy street-wall of Prince's Dock (an obstruction long since removed) a common sailor, so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterated blood of Ham. A symmetric figure, much above the average in height. The two ends of a gay silk handkerchief thrown loose about the neck danced upon the displayed ebony of his chest; in his ears were big hoops of gold, and a Scotch Highland bonnet with a tartan band set off his shapely head. . . .

The emblem of Lucy Tartan (the symbol in *Pierre* of the illuminating grace of consciousness) enlightens the forehead of the Handsome Sailor as he emerges from the depths of Night into the consciousness of Day. He moves as ponderously, but with as much strength and beauty, as Bulkington in *Moby Dick,* or as revolutionary America itself, setting forth on the path of civilization.

Still, this magnificent and momentous figure does not appear at full scale in any of Melville's books. But Melville made two attempts to portray him fully: one in *Pierre* and one in *Billy Budd.* Not the least part of the wisdom which Melville had achieved at the end of *Pierre* (1852) was his realization that he could not portray this heroic figure, except as a perpetual adolescent whose suicide was entirely justified by the fact that he was no match for the realities of the world. At the end of *Pierre,* civilization was shown to be in the hands of conventional society, military power, and Laodicean liberalism. In *Billy Budd* civilization is shown to be in approximately the same hands. And the hero who opposes these forces is no more capable of doing so than Pierre. Indeed, Billy Budd is a less effective hero than Pierre, for he has not even the humanity of adolescence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet *Billy Budd* is a brilliant piece of writing, nicely constructed and balanced between swift, stark action and moral-philosophical comment. Though it falls sadly short of the pure tragedy Melville apparently wanted to write, it is still a moving drama, if a drama only of pathos. And though the portrait of Billy Budd is unacceptable, the other main characters bear the stamp of the author's great intellectual powers as few of his characters do.

As in *Israel Potter,* the scene is the revolutionary days of the late eighteenth century, a period whose still "undetermined momentousness" Melville thought unsurpassed in the whole range of history. This period seemed to Melville to be America's primeval time, when its first great acts were performed and its best hopes discovered. But the spirit of heroism and liberation could be felt in other nations too, and Billy Budd, though he might as easily have been an American, is in fact an Englishman. He is a youth of twenty-one. His physical strength and beauty no less than his frank simplicity and good will make him a favorite aboard the merchant ship "Rights-of-Man," where we first discover him. Homeward bound near England, the "Rights-of-Man" is stopped by the outward-bound frigate H.M.S. "Indomitable." The frigate is shorthanded, and Billy Budd is impressed aboard and given a post in the foretop. He easily gains the affection and respect of the men and officers—with one exception. The exception is Claggart, the wonderfully conceived and depicted master-at-arms. For no easily determined reason Claggart is down on Billy Budd, as an oracular old sailor suggests when Billy comes to him for counsel. With an inhuman cunning Claggart sets his trap for Billy Budd, contriving in various ways to cast suspicion on him. The story takes place shortly after the British Navy has been badly shaken by unprecedented waves of mutiny in the ranks. And so Claggart's best strategy is to involve Billy Budd in a charge of insurrection. He goes to the quarterdeck and tells Captain Vere that Budd is plotting mutiny. The captain, though more suspicious of Claggart than of the accused man, calls them both to his cabin. There Claggart, looking deeply and unflinchingly into Billy Budd's eyes with a kind of savage sharklike hunger and hatred, repeats his charge. Billy Budd has always been handicapped by a stammer which overcomes his power of speech in moments of excitement. He is unable to answer the charge, even though the captain bene-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volently puts his hand on Billy's shoulder and tells him to take his time. The blocked utterance bursts forth not in the form of speech but as a tremendous blow on Claggart's forehead from Billy Budd's fist—and the master-at-arms is killed on the spot. A drumhead court is quickly summoned, and though both the court and the captain himself are tormented with a deep compunction, they soon sentence Billy Budd to be hanged at dawn. Billy Budd dies murmuring "God bless Captain Vere."

It is often said that *Billy Budd* shows Melville's final admission of the tragic necessity of law in human society. But Melville had admitted this forty years earlier in *White-Jacket* and had reaffirmed it in *Moby Dick* by showing that the tragic dilemma of Ahab was in part due to his necessary commitment to the external forms of command. He makes no *discovery* of law in *Billy Budd;* he simply deals with the subject more carefully than he had before. Captain Vere's examination and defense of law in a man-of-war world and his decision that a human life must be sacrificed to this law is impeccable, irrefutable, and fully conscious of the pathetic irony of the situation. The flaw in the book is that Melville does not fully conceive of that which, in a genuine tragedy, has to be opposed to law.

Captain Vere and Claggart are perfectly portrayed. The captain's name—Edward Fairfax Vere—indicates that he is Man (*vir*), but civilized Man. Though emotionally superior to the laws of "Cain's City," he nevertheless lives according to these laws in all practical matters. Profoundly moved by the plight of Billy Budd, Captain Vere resolves to communicate the decision of the court to Billy in person, and in doing so he assumes the relationship we so often meet in Melville's books: he becomes father to a son. (Billy Budd is a primordial image of Upton Sinclair's Lanny Budd or of the cartoonist Low's blond young common man, standing with mindless, questioning eyes before Hermann Goering or Franklin D. Roosevelt.)

The possibility that Vere may in fact be Billy Budd's father is not contradicted by the author; for Billy was a foundling and, as the author suggests, a by-blow of some English nobleman. Billy Budd's fate has so shaken Captain Vere that the ship's surgeon suspects a touch of madness, a question which Melville carefully leaves open. Perhaps the captain's touch of madness is only his own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrible consciousness of having finally fulfilled the destiny of "citified man"—to recognize oneself as Caesar and one's son as Christ.

Claggart is about thirty-five. He is tall and spare, with classic features, except for a disproportionate heaviness of the chin. His hand is rather too small and there is a sort of intellectual pallor on his forehead. He has a trace of foreign accent and is thought in these Anglo-Saxon surroundings to have some affinity with a Mediterranean culture. Strangely, Claggart is another version of Melville's self-righteous Liberal, the Confidence Man. He is the Confidence Man plus an actively evil nature. The figure in Melville's great satire was not the evil man so much as "the moderate man, the inveterate understrapper to the evil man." Claggart is the Confidence Man invested with "natural depravity" willed by paranoiac guile and controlled by superior intellect. In his campaign against Billy Budd, he employs all the devices of "confidence." Subtly obsequious, outwardly frank and friendly, he is a "fair-spoken man," speaking in silvery accents with a "confidential" tongue. Conducting himself with "uncommon prudence" and speaking with a pharisiacal sense of "retributive righteousness," he sells his case to Captain Vere. Billy Budd, says Claggart, is a "deep one"; under the fair exterior there is a "man-trap." In his present unquiet position, this is an argument the captain cannot ignore. Claggart has merely to enunciate his charge and his case is won.

So highly "citified" is Claggart's depraved mind that, like the mind of mankind, it generates a compensatory vision of Innocence. And this vision is at the root of his ambivalent feeling toward Billy Budd, finding its expression to some extent in a homosexual attraction. Billy Budd's "harmlessness" fills Claggart with both longing and revulsion at the same time that Budd's physical beauty attracts him. Like Milton's Satan, thinking of the Garden, Claggart is capable of looking at Billy Budd and weeping "feverish tears." He weeps at being unable to put off the burden of civilization and be "harmless." But in less regressive moments he can feel the active bitterness of the ambiguous attraction-repulsion which Billy rouses in him. "To be nothing more than innocent!" Such a being is in the deepest sense a mutineer, an Apostate from Cain's City. It is very difficult not to agree with Claggart.

The weakness of *Billy Budd* is the central character himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The trouble is that he is not in any meaningful sense what Claggart says he is: "deep" and a "man-trap." He *ought* to be "deep" and in some inescapable human way a "man-trap." Otherwise he cannot function meaningfully in a tragedy which tries to demonstrate the opposition between human nature and the heart on the one hand and law on the other. Otherwise he cannot possibly be the Handsome Sailor. It is surely significant of uncertainty that Melville, though outwardly identifying Billy Budd with the Handsome Sailor throughout the novel, actually hedges on this point when he first makes it. The fact is that Billy Budd is the final, and almost the first—first *crucial*—self-indulgence of a great intelligence.

Melville makes an attempt to show that in the course of the story Billy Budd finds the consummation of his destiny. Having been sentenced to die by the man who may possibly be his father, Billy Budd, Melville intimates, can at last drop the role of Ishmael, the disinherited son, and become Isaac, the lawful heir. In *White-Jacket* the recognition and final meeting of father and son was symbolized as an act of maturity on the part of the son, a recognition of human depravity, an admission of law, form, and patriarchal majesty, and a consequent liberation of the son's creative energy. In *Billy Budd,* Melville insists on trying to have it both ways. There are suggestions that Billy Budd has experienced a metamorphosis of character through his suffering. The reader accepts this gratefully and with belief. And he reflects that after all Melville is going to say that Billy Budd is now the Ishmael who has become Isaac, the harmless Adam who has become the fallen Adam, the foundling of noble antecedents who has become Oedipus the tragic hero. But not so. Billy is hanged after sleeping the night out with the serene light of babyhood playing over his features. When a man is hanged, certain involuntary spasms take place in his body during which there may be an emptying of the bowels and an ejaculation of semen. When Billy Budd is hanged, there is a total "absence of spasmodic movement." The tragedy of Melville's heroes had always been that they were "unmanned" by circumstances or the effects of their own moral decisions. Billy Budd is unmanned by Melville himself.

By portraying Billy Budd, not as Isaac or the fallen Adam or Oedipus, but as the innocent hermaphrodite Christ who ascends serenely to the yardarm of the frigate, Melville made it impossible

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for us to see the tragedy we ought to see in the betrayal of the young hero to the man of power and law by the man of "retributive righteousness." Billy Budd is pre-eminently the beatified boy of the liberal-progressive myth, the figure who gets "pushed around," the figure "to whom things happen." His suffering and death are without moral content. Innocence, Melville had said in *Clarel,* is the act of the true heart reflecting upon evil. In the high tragedy of Cain's City, this is the only kind of innocence we can take seriously or believe in. Melville is possibly our greatest critic of the liberal-progressive ethos. But this we must see *in spite of Billy Budd.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

POUND, JEFFERS, AND OTHERS

THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND. New Directions. $5.00.
THE DOUBLE AXE AND OTHER POEMS. By Robinson Jeffers. Random House. $2.75.
SELECTED POEMS. By Vernon Watkins. New Directions. $3.00.
A LITTLE TREASURY OF AMERICAN POETRY. Edited by Oscar Williams. Charles Scribner's Sons. $3.00.

In an ill-regulated (usurious) society, nothing fits, Pound says. The bread is bad, crafts are lost, "None learneth to weave gold in her pattern," and "corpses are set to banquet." In a regulated society, "When the prince has gathered about him/ All the savants and artists, his riches will be fully employed." So were the riches employed of the tyrant Sigismundo Malatesta, rapist, strangler, poisoner, breaker of treaties, in building a marvelously adorned pagan temple to celebrate, while his second wife still lived, his passion for Isotta degli Atti. Tyrants act like tyrants, though they should be guided by the councils of Confucius, of Kung, who wrote on the bo leaves: "If a man have not order within him/ He can not spread order about him," and "Anyone can run to excesses,/ it is easy to shoot past the mark,/ It is hard to stand firm in the middle."

If the prince, "the Boss," Mussolini or Willie Stark, is properly advised, he can maintain in righteous stability the unchanging society ordained by heaven, can exact benevolently the feudal submission of subjects, can found a long-lasting dynasty, like that of the Pharaohs, who ruled Egypt by "authentic utterance" according to the design of Maat, or right order, inherent in the structure of creation. But the *Analects* themselves are hardly more ordered than the *Cantos,* and when Confucius set out to write a history, *Spring and Autumn,* to which Pound frequently refers, his characterization of men and events, of murders and treacheries, raised as many perplexing questions of morality for his disciples as some of the more Coughlinite passages in the *Cantos.* We are on surer ground with the Adamses whose letters and journals, quoted,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

misquoted, and colloquialized, make the substance of some ten of the cantos. The theme is the same, however: the maintenance of class distinctions, the conservative rule of an enlightened few, who understand by Right Reason the relation between the cosmos and society, in this case the Stoic cosmos of Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus,* "part of Adams' *paideuma.*"

Pound's is a much barer, more eighteenth-century cosmos than that of his friend Yeats, whose 4000 year cycle, though ultimately delimiting and anti-historical, could give imaginative order to a wide range of historical events and characters, Troy and Calvary, Alexander and Pope Julius. But Pound, whose *Cantos* Yeats complained about in the preface to the *Vision,* goes back into history in a tinkering spirit, to see what was done or might have been done to bring order into a regime anytime anywhere by control of credit. The disorder of most Western and Chinese history is simply "sheer ignorance ov the natr ov money," and in the West in the last century and a half, this has been intensified by "a few big jews' vendetta on goyim."

What is needed is a strong ruler (even Pétain rather than Blum) to keep order, and someone who understands social credit to advise him, as Pound advised Mussolini and tried, through Borah and Bankhead, to reach Roosevelt on Pound's visit to this country just before the war. Since "with one day's reading a man may have the key in his hands," the problem is rational and technical, and history is conceived imaginatively not as a total development, but as a disorder to be stopped and set right by a formula. "But in Russia they bungled and did not apparently/ grasp the idea of work-certificate."

With such simplification, most of history becomes irrelevant: all the complex relationships of types of sensibility, character, ideas and institutions to economic and technical developments, and all the human drama of good and bad will, of conflicting values, and of moral choice. But Pound is a poet, alive to quiddities, the *haecceitas* "thisness" of Duns Scotus, whom he, like Hopkins, greatly admires. And so while he searches history as journalist and polemicist for certain constants in the governing of a state where the arts flourish, he responds as poet to the amusing anecdotes, the characteristic modes of utterance, the beauties of context and imaginative association, which he encounters in his search. These contextual and non-rational elements are not used, however, to qualify and transform the ideas, which, on the contrary, are unaffected by them. And so the poetry is never ideographic in the way that Pound and his admirers assert. In an ideogram, brushed-in images, at once concrete and general, are brought together in such a way, in such a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Song of the Cold
by
Edith Sitwell

This long-awaited volume, gathering as it does the latest and greatly heralded poems of Miss Sitwell, more than confirms the high praise already bestowed upon her.

"She was indeed already a poet, and a famous one, but the poetry of *The Song of the Cold* is so enormously richer in both technique and content that it strikes one as a new creation, not merely a step forward."—JOHN LEHMANN in the *N. Y. Times Book Review.* $2.75

Also **GREEN SONG** $3.00

at all bookstores

Vanguard

Charles Williams

Have you discovered the man of whom . . .

T. S. ELIOT said, "There are no novels anywhere like his. In the first place, they are good thrillers. They are exciting. In the second place, they are the work of a man who had something very serious to convey. To Charles Williams the supernatural was perfectly natural and the natural was also supernatural. And this peculiarity gave him a profound insight into Good and Evil, into the Heights of Heaven and the Depths of Hell."

C. S. LEWIS said, "He is the contemporary from whom I learned most, not any particular truths but what matters more, a whole temper of mind."

The first in a series of his novels to be published in America.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE

At all bookstores, $2.75 *PELLEGRINI and CUDAHY*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suggestive interaction, that they form both an aesthetic and ideational whole, just the way a good poem does.

This does not occur in the *Cantos,* even in the use of personal experience, in the accounts of "Ole Possum," "Willy," the "telluric Amy," and the things they said during the years when Pound was fighting from abroad the philistinism of an unregulated democracy. It is not until the *Pisan Cantos,* so much better than the arid stretches of Chinese and Federalist history immediately preceding them, that a significant change occurs. The situational context, more fully and consistently imaged, is now dramatically limited to a military prison-camp full of Negroes, some under sentence of death, and Pound is there as a direct consequence of his own actions. This does not affect the explicit ideas, which remain detached and unideographic, but it does affect the sense of the self, which is now no longer merely the superior carrier of talent and knowledge, but as an active moral agent is inextricably involved in the historical pattern. The result is a new humanity, tenderness, maturity, with no loss of lyric beauty or of wit. "Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,/ I have been hard as youth sixty years."

Unfortunately nothing comparable has happened to Robinson Jeffers, who represents to a far more extreme degree than Pound the human moral failures, the arrogance, the egotism, the limitation of intelligence, the youthful hardness that prevent a genuine imaginative development. Jeffers uses poetry simply to express an attitude; therefore the attitude has never changed. In Jeffers' successive works we have no sense of the way in which a poem, a true poem, once created, becomes a fact, a reality, and consequently falls into dynamic relationship not only with other existing poems, but with the kind of actual events it refers to, the ideas it affirms or denies, and with privacies of the poet's conscious and unconscious mind. These privacies the poem not so much expresses as shapes into a meaningful combination which is a discovery, and a point of departure for new discoveries. The direction of future discovery is determined by the tensions, the coherences and incompatibilities which the preceding poems, by their very existence, have brought into being for the poet. This is the experimental sequence which explains the creative development of most of the major writers.

Jeffers, however, in his youth, accepting both the cosmos of nineteenth century materialism and the theological warning of the human consequences of such an acceptance, could get out of his dilemma only by rejecting human values and human history in favor of the hawks and the hills. He was still a part of humanity and history, though, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrote about them. Moreover, he remembered that Nietzsche said, "The poets? The poets lie too much," and he determined to tell the truth. This did not mean a constant search for truth, in which one can go only a little way in a lifetime, but speaking the truth he thought he already had. He had rejected the historic, philosophic or religious values by which his truths could be measured, modified or developed. And so they degenerated into mere reflexes, into the truths of the *Chicago Tribune*, into something far uglier, far grosser politically than the truths of Ezra Pound. Without tensions and pressures to form them, the verses are lax in poetic line and journalistic in phrasing. Above all, since Jeffers has separated man from nature and himself from society, truth does not include for him the fact that his attitudes, like the attitudes of other men, have a determining social and psychological history. His tales of murder, torture, necrophilism and incest sound more and more like sexual fantasies which have ceased to excite because of too unvaried repetition. Nothing could be more wearily, uncreatively determined than the image of "Vere Harnish/ Kneeling against the bed beside her mother's half-naked body, pumping a pen-knife into it." Marx and Freud, wherever their insights have been separated from their dogmas,

Cornell University Press

THE LIBERAL SPIRIT: *Essays on Problems of Freedom in the Modern World.* By Horace M. Kallen, New School for Social Research. The papers which compose this book deal with a theme as old as philosophy, for human societies have always been faced with the encroachment of ideologies of power upon the free conscience of man. These addresses and essays represent the reactions of a leading educator and philosopher to this central conflict over a period of twenty years during which the freedom of man has been jeopardized the world over in ways both subtle and direct. *254 pages, $3.00.*

THE THEORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.
By Howard Mumford Jones, Harvard University. Written in Professor Jones' incisive style, this history of literary criticism in America bypasses the preciousness of many literary historians and deals forthrightly with the growth of literary criticism in America from the days of the frontier, the Bible, and the Boston Brahmins to the days of the publishing trusts, the book clubs and the new cynicism. Tribute is paid to the men who have made literary history a mature part of our thought and education. *218 pages, $2.75.*

Order from Cornell University Press, 124 Roberts Place, Ithaca, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have freed the younger poets from this kind of fatuity and self-betrayal. They are far better acquainted with the complexities of truth, and more humble in its presence.

The cosmos of Vernon Watkins is not a machine or chaos, and is not separate from man, but is imaginatively alive, full of terror and beauty, of powers suggested by Frazer, Jane Harrison, Jung, Freud, popular Christianity, and Welsh folk customs. Watkins is a good poet, and his vision is an authentic one, both psychologically and anthropologically. It is most dramatic in the remarkable *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd,* where the selfish, fearful living, in a rhyming contest, try to keep from their door the corrupt, demanding dead. But in the few poems which deal with the present, with history, with relations within society, the cosmology suddenly seems a little quaint and folkish, with its top or cortical layer missing.

For men now have been forced into an intense cosmic awareness that results not only from the traditional metaphysical and religious questions as scientific discoveries have sharpened them, but from a practical situation in which a pillaged, perhaps overpopulated and certainly divided world is preparing "unconventional" modes of war of a highly antibiotic nature. Men have a very thorough sense of being in nature, in government, in history, in the world, and these relationships are of the most urgent concern. The complexity and unity of the whole is evidenced by the *Pravda* statement on the Lysenko case, in which Stalin, as part of his struggle against the West, maintained, like the Pharaohs, the order of nature against the chaos of "accident" with which Morgan-Mendelianism had threatened it.

With everything thus relevant, the poets are best equipped for the necessary work of synthesis. They no longer are governed or excused by the implications of Eliot's early apology in which he justified the differences between his prose opinions and a poetic sensibility which was the damaged product of "an unsettled society." They no longer believe that society can be given order by a formula or set of dogmas, whereupon the good health of the arts and individual sensibility will automatically follow. They know that valuable social changes result only from the individual responsibility, the intelligence, the self-understanding and love of a great many people, and that poetry has its part in the process. They know, moreover, that through insight, honesty, and creative will, poetic sensibility and moral ideas can gradually be brought into harmony. This is the impression one gets from reading the best, perhaps one-third, of the later poems in Oscar Williams' anthology, poems by writers as different as Auden, Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, John

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Berryman, Delmore Schwartz and Peter Viereck. These poems are not merely a display of sensibility, of imagistic virtuosity, but represent the subtle, controlled conquest of a form-giving idea. Unlike the poems of Pound they are true ideograms, and make new words in a language that more and more men can learn to speak.

Robert Gorham Davis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This tenth annual "exhibition gallery" of trends in contemporary writing is notable for the very large number of promising new "discoveries" it contains. In addition to these exciting new writers, there are such special features as: little anthologies of contemporary French, Italian and Peruvian poetry; photographs of the ruins of Munich; and provocative essays on the American scene by Evelyn Waugh and Mary McCarthy. There are also representative pieces by Agee, Bowles, Céline, Eberhart, Eluard, Lowry, Michaux, Rosenfeld, Viereck, Tennessee Williams and thirty-four others. $4.50

A Celebration for Edith Sitwell

Many English critics consider Edith Sitwell one of the most important poets writing today. Miss Sitwell and her brother Sir Osbert Sitwell are now in America on a lecture tour. To celebrate their visit New Directions is publishing a critical symposium on her work by several of the leading writers of our time, including Gertrude Stein, Stephen Spender, Frederic Prokosch, Charles Morgan—as well as a selection of her most important poems. $1.50

NEW DIRECTIONS BOOKS · 500 FIFTH AVE., N. Y. C.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*Continued from page 1174*)

mother's adventure with the bull, but according to my mother he simply remarked 'Here I have some difficulty in following you.' 'What's done is done, and nothing can undo it,' he added. When it comes to us, he'll do the same. At the most, he'll banish you from the court—and a lot of difference that'll make! Wherever you go, I shall follow."

That remains to be seen, I thought to myself.

After we had taken a light breakfast, I asked her to be kind enough to lead me to Daedalus, and added that I wished to speak to him privately and alone. She only agreed to this after I had sworn by Poseidon that immediately our talk was over I would rejoin her at the palace.

VII

Daedalus rose to welcome me. I had found him in a dim-lit room, bending over the tablets and working-drawings which were spread before him, and surrounded by a great many peculiar instruments. He was very tall, and perfectly erect in spite of his great age. His beard was silvery in color, and even longer than that of Minos, which was still quite black, or the fairer one of Rhadamanthus. His vast forehead was marked by deep wrinkles across the whole of its width. When he looked downwards, his eyes were half-hidden by the overhanging brushwood of his eyebrows. He spoke slowly, and in a deep voice. His silences had the quality of thought.

He began by congratulating me on my prowess. The echo of this, he said, had penetrated even to him, who lived in retirement, remote from the tumult of the world. He added that I looked to him to be something of a booby; that he took little account of feats of arms, and did not consider that physical strength was the godhead of man.

"At one time I saw quite a lot of your predecessor, Hercules. He was a stupid man, and I could never get anything out of him, except heroics. But what I did appreciate in him, and what I appreciate in you, is a sort of absorption in the task in hand, an unrecoiling audacity, a temerity even, which thrusts you forward and destroys your opponent, after first having destroyed the coward whom each of us carries within

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself. Hercules took greater pain than you do; was more anxious, also, to do well; rather melancholy, especially when he had just completed an adventure. But what I like in you is your enjoyment; that is where you differ from Hercules. I shall commend you for never letting your mind interfere. You can leave that to others who are not men of action, but are clever at inventing sound and good motives for those who are.

"Do you realize that we are cousins? I too (but don't repeat this to Minos, who knows nothing about it)—I too am Greek. I was forced regretfully to leave Attica, after certain differences had arisen between myself and my nephew Talos, a sculptor, like myself, and my rival. He became a popular favorite, and claimed to uphold the dignity of the gods, by representing them with their lower limbs set fast in a hieratic posture, and thus incapable of movement; whereas I was for setting free their limbs, and bringing the gods nearer to ourselves. Olympus, thanks to me, became once again a neighbor of the earth. By way of complement, I aspired, with the aid of science, to mould mankind in the likeness of the gods.

"At your age, I longed above all to acquire knowledge. I soon decided that man's personal strength can effect little or nothing without instruments, and that the old saying 'Better a good tool than a strong forearm' was perfectly true. Assuredly you could never have subdued the bandits of Attica and the Peloponnese without the weapons which your father had given you. So I thought I could not employ myself more usefully than by bringing these auxiliaries nearer to perfection, that I could not do this without first mastering mathematics, mechanics and geometry to the degree, at any rate, in which they were known in Egypt, where such things are put to great use; also that I must then pass from theory to practice by learning all that was known about the properties and qualities of every kind of material—even of those for which no immediate use was apparent, for in these (as happens also in the human sphere) one sometimes discovers extraordinary qualities which one had never expected to find. And so I widened and entrenched my knowledge.

"To familiarize myself with other trades, other crafts and skills, other climates and other living things, I set myself to visit distant countries, put myself to school with eminent foreigners, and remained with them until they had nothing more to teach me. But no matter where I went, or how long I stayed, I remained a Greek. In the same way it is because I know and feel that you are a son of Greece that I am interested in you, my cousin.

"Once back in Crete, I told Minos all about my studies and my travels; and went on to tell him of a project which I had cherished.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This was to build and equip, not far from his palace (if he approved the plan and would provide the means to carry it out) a labyrinth like the one which I had admired in Egypt, on the shore of lake Moeris; mine would however be different in plan. At that very moment, Minos was in an awkward position. His queen had whelped a monster; not knowing how best to look after it, but judging it prudent to isolate it and keep it well away from the public gaze, he asked me to devise a building and a set of communicating gardens which, without precisely imprisoning the monster, would at least contain him, and make it impossible for him to get loose. I lavished all my scholarship, all my best thoughts on the task.

"But, believing that no prison can withstand a really obstinate intention to escape, and that there is no barrier, no ditch which daring and resolution will not overcome, I thought that the best way of containing a prisoner in the labyrinth was to make it of such a kind, not that he couldn't get out (try to grasp my meaning here) but that he wouldn't want to get out. I therefore assembled in this one place the means to satisfy every kind of appetite. The Minotaur's tastes were neither many nor various; but we had to plan for everybody, whosoever it might be, who would enter the labyrinth. Another, and indeed the prime, necessity was to fine down the visitor's will-power to the point of extinction. To this end I made up some electuaries, and had them mixed with the wines which were served. But that was not enough; I found a better way. I had noticed that certain plants, when thrown into the fire, gave off, as they burned, semi-narcotic vapors. These seemed admirably suited to my purpose, and indeed they played exactly the part for which I needed them. Accordingly I had them fed to the stoves, which are kept alight night and day. The heavy gases thus distributed do not only act upon the will, and put it to sleep; they induce a delicious intoxication, rich in flattering delusions, and provoke the mind, filled as this is with volptuous mirages, to a certain pointless activity: 'pointless,' I say, because it has merely an imaginary outcome, in visions and speculations without order, logic or substance. The effect of these gases is not the same for all of those who breathe them; each is led on by the complexities implicit in his own mind to lose himself, if I may so put it, in a labyrinth of his own devising. For my son Icarus, the complexities were metaphysical. For me, they take the form of enormous edifices, palatial buildings heaped upon themselves with an elaboration of corridors and staircases . . . . in which (as with my son's speculations) everything leads to a blank wall, a mysterious KEEP OUT. But the most surprising thing about these perfumes is that, when one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has inhaled them for a certain time, they are already indispensable; body and mind have formed a taste for this malicious insobriety; outside of it, reality seems charmless and one no longer has any wish to return to it. And that, that above all, is what keeps one inside the labyrinth. Knowing that you want to enter it in order to fight the Minotaur, I give you fair warning; and if I have told you at length of this danger, it was to put you on your guard. You will never bring it off alone; Ariadne must go with you. But she must remain on the threshold, and not so much as sniff the vapors. It is important that she should keep a clear head, while you are being overcome by drunkenness. But, even when drunk, you must keep control of yourself; everything depends on that. Your will alone may not suffice (for, as I told you, these emanations will weaken it) and so I have thought of this plan: to link you and Ariadne by a thread, the tangible symbol of duty. This thread will allow, indeed will compel you to rejoin her after you have been some time away. Be always determined not to break it, no matter what may be the charms of the labyrinth, the seduction of the unknown, or the headlong urging of your own courage. Go back to her, or all the rest, and the best with it, will be lost. This thread will be your link with the past. Go back to it. Go back to yourself. For nothing can begin from nothing, and it is from your past, and from what you are at this moment, that what you are going to be must spring.

"I should have spoken more briefly if I had not been so interested in you. But before you go out to meet your destiny, I want you to hear my son. You will realize more vividly, while listening to him, what danger you will presently run. Although he was able, thanks to me, to escape the witchcraft of the maze, his mind is still most pitiably a slave to its maleficence."

He walked over to a small door, lifted the arras which covered it, and said very loudly:

"Icarus, my dear son, come and tell us of your distress. Or rather, go on thinking aloud, as if you were still alone. Pay no attention to me or to my guest. Behave as if neither of us was here."

VIII

I saw coming in a young man of about my own age, who seemed in the half-light to be a great beauty. His fair hair was worn very long, and fell in ringlets to his shoulders. He stared fixedly, but seemed not to focus his gaze on anything in particular. Naked to the waist, he wore a tight metal belt and a loincloth, as it seemed to me, of leather and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dark cloth; this swathed the top of his thighs, and was held in place by a curious and prominent knot. His white leather boots caught my eye, and seemed to suggest that he was making ready to go out; but his mind alone was on the move. Himself seemed not to see us. Proceeding no doubt with some unbroken chain of argument, he was saying:

"Who came first: man or woman? Can the Eternal One be female? From the womb of what great Mother have you come, all you myriad species? And by what engendering cause can that womb have been made great? Duality is inadmissible. In that case, God himself would be the son. My mind refuses to divide God. If once I allow division, strife begins. Where there are gods, there are wars. There are not gods, but a God. The kingdom of God is peace. All is absorbed, all is reconciled in the Unique Being."

He was silent for a moment and then went on:

"If man is to give a form to the gods, he must localize and reduce. God spreads where he will. The gods are divided. His extension is immense: theirs, merely local."

He was silent again, before going on in a voice panting with anguish:

"But what is the reason for all this, O God who art lucidity itself? For so much trouble, so many struggles? And towards what? What is our purpose here? Why do we seek reasons for everything? Where are we to turn, if not towards God? How are we to direct our steps? Where are we to stop? When can we say: so be it; nothing more to be done? How can we reach God, after starting from man? And if I start from God, how can I reach across to myself? Yet, if man is the creation of God, is not God the creation of man? It is at the exact crossing place of those roads, at the very heart of that cross, that my mind would fix itself."

As he spoke, the veins swelled out on his forehead and the sweat ran down his temples. At least, so it seemed to me, for I could not see him clearly in the half-light; but I heard him gasping, like a man putting forth an immense effort.

He was quiet for a moment, then went on.

"I don't know where God begins, and still less where he ends. I shall even express myself more exactly if I say that his beginning never ends. Ah! How sick I am of 'therefore,' and 'since,' and 'because'! Sick of inference, sick of deduction. I never learn anything, from the finest of syllogisms, that I haven't first put into it myself. If I put God in at the beginning, he comes out at the end. I don't find him unless

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I do put him in. I have tramped all the roads of logic. On their horizontal plane I have wandered all too often. I crawl, and I would rather take wings. To lose my shadow, to lose the filth of my body, to throw off the weight of the past! The infinite calls me! I have the sensation of being drawn upwards from a great height. O mind of man, I shall climb to your topmost height. My father, with his great knowledge of mechanics, will provide me with the means to go. I shall travel alone. I'm not afraid. I can pay my way. It's my only chance to escape. O noble mind, too long entangled in the confusion of my problems, an unchartered road is waiting for you now. I cannot define what it is that summons me; but I know that my journey can have only one end in God."

And he backed away from us as far as the arras, which he raised, and afterwards let drop behind him.

"Poor dear boy," said Daedalus. "As he thought he could never escape from the labyrinth, and did not understand that the labyrinth was within himself, at his request I made him a set of wings, with which he was able to fly away. He thought that he could only escape by way of the heavens, all terrestrial routes being blocked. I knew him to be of a mystical turn, so that his longing did not surprise me. A longing, however, which has not been fulfilled, as you will have been able to judge for yourself while listening to him. In spite of my warnings, he tried to fly too high, and overtaxed his strength. He fell into the sea. He is dead."

"How can that be?" I burst out. "I saw him alive only a moment ago."

"Yes," he answered. "You did see him, and he seemed to be alive. But he is dead. At this point, Theseus, I am afraid that your intelligence, although Greek, and as such subtle and open to all aspects of the truth, cannot follow me; for I myself, I must own, was slow to grasp and concede this fact; those of us whose souls, when weighed in the supreme scale, are not judged of too little account, do not just live an ordinary life. In time, as we mortals measure it, we grow up, accomplish our destiny, and die. But there is another, truer eternal plane on which time does not exist; on this plane the representative gestures of our race are inscribed, each according to its particular significance. Icarus was, before his birth, and remains after his death, the image of man's disquiet, of the impulse to discovery, the soaring flight of poetry—the things of which, during his short life, he was the incarnation. He played out his hand, as he owed it to himself to do; but he didn't end there. What happens, in the case of a hero, is this: his mark endures. Poetry and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arts reanimate it and it becomes an enduring symbol. That is how it is that Orion the hunter is riding still, across Elysian fields of asphodel, in search of the prey which he has already killed on earth; and meanwhile the night-sky bears the eternal, constellated image of him and his baldric. That is how Tantalus' throat is parched to all eternity, and how Sisyphus still rolls upward towards an unattainable summit the heavy and ever-rebounding weight of care which tormented him in the days when he was King of Corinth. For you must realize that in Hell the only punishment is to begin over and over again the actions which, in life, one had failed to complete.

"In the same way, in the animal kingdom, the death of a creature in no way impoverishes its species, for this retains its habitual shape and behavior; there are no individuals among the beasts. Whereas among men it is the individual alone who counts. That is why Minos is already leading at Cnossos the life which will fit him for his career as a judge in Hell. That is why Pasiphae and Ariadne are yielding to their destiny in such exemplary fashion. And you yourself, Theseus, may appear carefree, and you may feel it, but you will not escape the destiny which is shaping you—any more than did Hercules, or Jason, or Perseus. But know this (because my eyes have learnt the art of discerning the future through the present)—there remain great things for you to do, and in a sphere quite different from that of your previous exploits; things beside which these exploits will seem, in the future, to have been the amusements of a child. It remains for you to found the city of Athens, and there to situate the supremacy of the human mind.

"Do not linger, therefore, in the labyrinth, or in the embrace of Ariadne, after the hideous combat from which you will emerge triumphant. Keep on the move. Regard indolence as treachery. Seek no rest until, with your destiny completed, it is time to die. It is only thus that, on the further side of what seems to be death, you will live for ever re-created by the gratitude of mankind. Keep on the move, keep well ahead, keep on your own road, O valiant gatherer of cities."

"And now listen carefully, Theseus, and remember what I say. No doubt you will have an easy victory over the Minotaur. Taken in the right way he is not so redoubtable as people suppose. (They used to say that he lived on carrion; but since when has a bull eaten anything but grass?) Nothing is easier than to get into the labyrinth, nothing less easy than to get out. Nobody finds his way, in there, without first losing it. And for your return journey (for footsteps leave no trace in the labyrinth) you must attach yourself to Ariadne by a thread. I have prepared several reels of this, and you shall take them away with you. Unwind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, as you make your way inside, and when the reel is exhausted, tie the end of it to the beginning of the next, so as never to have a break in the chain. Then on your way back you must re-wind the thread until you come to the end which Ariadne will have in her hand. I don't know why I insist so much, when all that part of the enterprise is as easy as good-morning. The real difficulty is to preserve unbroken, to the last inch of the thread, the will to come back; for the perfumes will make you forgetful, as will also your natural curiosity, which will conspire to make you weaken. I have told you this already, and have nothing to add. Here are the reels. Goodbye."

I left Daedalus and made off to rejoin Ariadne.

IX

Those reels of thread were the occasion of the first dispute between Ariadne and myself. She wanted me to hand over to her, for safe keeping in her corsage, those same reels which Daedalus had entrusted to me. She claimed that to wind and unwind such things was a woman's job (one, in fact, in which she was particularly expert) and that she wanted to spare me the bother of attending to it. But in reality she hoped in this way to remain the mistress of my fate, a thing to which I would not consent at any price. Moreover I had another suspicion. Ariadne would be reluctant to unwind, where every turn of the reel allowed me to stray farther from herself: she might hold back the thread, or pull it towards her; in such a case I should be prevented from going in as far as I wanted. I therefore stood my ground, in the face even of that last argument of women, a flood of tears—knowing well that if one once begins to yield one's little finger, they are quick to snap up the whole arm, and the rest with it.

The thread in question was neither of linen, nor of wool. Daedalus had made it from some unknown material, which even my sword, when I experimented with a little piece, was powerless to cut. I left the sword in Ariadne's care, being determined (after what Daedalus had said to me about the superiority which man owes wholly to his instruments, and the decisive role of these in my victories over the monsters)—being determined, as I say, to subdue the Minotaur with the strength of my bare hands. When, after all this we arrived before the entrance to the labyrinth, a portal embellished with that double axe which one saw everywhere in Crete, I entreated Ariadne on no account to stir from the spot. She insisted that she should herself tie the end of the thread to my wrist, with a knot which she was pleased to call a lover's;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she then glued her lips to my own, and held them there for what seemed to me an interminable time. I was longing to get on.

My thirteen companions, both male and female, had gone on ahead Pirithöus among them; I found them in the first big room, already quite fuddled by the vapors. I should have mentioned that, together with the thread, Daedalus had given me a piece of rag drenched with a powerful specific against the gases, and had pressed me most particularly to employ it as a gag. (This also Ariadne had taken in hand, as we stood before the entrance to the labyrinth.) Thanks to it, and though hardly able to breathe, I was able in the midst of these intoxicating vapors to keep my head clear and my will taut. I was rather suffocated, all the same, because, as I've said before, I never feel really well when I'm not in the open air.

Unreeling the thread, I penetrated into a second room, darker than the first; then into another, still darker; then into a fourth, where I could only grope my way. My hand, brushing along the wall, fell upon the handle of a door. I opened it, and stepped into brilliant sunshine. Facing me, and stretched at length upon a flowery bed of buttercups, pansies, jonquils, tulips and carnations, I saw the Minotaur. As luck would have it, he was asleep. I ought to have hurried forward and taken advantage of this; but something held me back, arrested my arm: the monster was beautiful. As happens with centaurs also, there was in his person a harmonious blending of human and animal elements. On top of this, he was young, and his youthfulness gave an indefinable bloom to his good looks; and I am more vulnerable to such things than to any show of strength. When faced with them, I needed to call upon all my reserves of energy. For one never fights better than with the doubled strength of hatred; and I could not hate the Minotaur. I even stood still for some time, and just looked at him. But he opened one eye. I saw then that he was completely witless, and that it was time for me to set about my task. . . . .

What I did next, and what happened, I cannot exactly recall. Tightly as I had been gagged, my mind had doubtless been benumbed by the gases in the first room; they affected my memory, and if, in spite of this, I vanquished the Minotaur, my recollection of the victory is confused, though on the whole, somewhat voluptuous. That must be my last word, since I refuse to invent. I have also many dreamlike memories of the charms of that garden; it so went to my head that I thought I could never bear to leave it; and it was only reluctantly that, after settling with the Minotaur, I rewound my thread and went back to the first room, there to rejoin my companions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They were seated at table. Before them a massive repast had been spread (how, or by whom, I cannot say). They were busy gormandizing, drinking heavily, making passes of love at one another, and braying like to many madmen or idiots. When I made as if to take them away, they replied that they were getting on very well and had no thought of leaving. I insisted, saying that I had come to deliver them. "Deliver us from what?" they shouted; and suddenly they all banded together and covered me with insults. I was very much distressed, because of Pirithöus. He could hardly recognize me, foreswore virtue, made mock of his own good qualities and told me roundly that not for all the glory in the world would he consent to give up his present enjoyments. All the same I couldn't blame him for it, because I knew too well, that, but for Daedalus' precautions, I should have foundered in the same way, and joined in the chorus with him and with the others. It was only by beating them hard on their behinds, that I got them to follow me; of course there was also the fact that they were so clogged by drink as to be incapable of resistance.

Once out of the labyrinth, how slowly and painfully they came back to their senses and re-assumed their normal selves! This they did with great sadness. It appeared to them (so they told me afterwards) as if they were climbing down from some high peak of happiness into a dark and narrow valley. Each rebuilt for himself the prison in which every man is his own jailor, and from which he could never again escape. Pirithös, however, soon showed himself aghast at his momentary degradation, and he promised to redeem himself, in his own eyes and in mine, by excess of zeal. An occasion was offered to him, not long afterwards, to give me proof of his devotion.

X

I hid nothing from him; he knew my feelings for Ariadne, and the abruptness of their decline. I did not even hide from him that, child though she might still be, I was very taken with Phaedra. She used often at that time to play on a swing strung up between the trunks of two palm-trees; and when I saw her at the top of her flight, with the wind lifting her short skirts, my heart would miss a beat. But when Ariadne appeared I looked the other way and dissembled my feelings as best I could, for fear of arousing in her the jealousy of an elder sister. Still, thwarted desires are not healthy. But if I was to abduct her, and thus bring off the audacious project which was beginning to simmer in my head, I should need to employ a ruse of some sort. Then it was that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pirithöus was able to help me by devising a plan stamped with all his fertile ingenuity. Meanwhile our stay in the island was dragging on, though both Ariadne and myself were obsessed with the idea of getting away. But what Ariadne didn't know was that I was resolved not to leave without Phaedra. Pirithöus knew it, and this is how he helped me.

He had more freedom than I—Ariadne stuck to me like a ball-and-chain—and he passed his leisure in the study and observation of the customs of the island. "I think," he said to me one morning, "that I've got just what we want. You know that Minos and Rhadamanthus, those two model legislators, have drawn up a code of morals for the island, paying particular attention to pederasty. As you know, too, the Cretans are especially prone to this, as is evident from their culture. So much so, in fact, that every adolescent who reaches manhood without having been chosen by some older admirer becomes ashamed, and regards his neglect as dishonorable; for if he is good-looking people generally conclude that some vice of heart or mind must be the cause. Young Glaucus, the son of Minos, who is Phaedra's absolute double, confided to me his anxiety in this respect. His friendless state causes him much distress. I made the vain suggestion that no doubt his princely rank has discouraged his admirers; he replied that this, though possible did not make his position in any way less painful, and that people ought to realize that it was also a grief to Minos; and that Minos as a rule disregards all distinctions of rank and position. All the same, he would certainly be flattered if an eminent prince like yourself were to be kind enough to take an interest in his son. It occurred to me that Ariadne, who shows herself so importunately jealous of her sister, would have no such feelings about her brother. There is hardly a single instance of a woman taking serious notice of the love of a man for a boy; in any case, she would think it unbecoming to show resentment. You need have no fear on that score."

"What!" I shouted, "Can you think that fear would ever stop me? But although I am a Greek, I do not feel myself drawn in any way towards people of my own sex, however young and attractive they may be. In this I differ from Hercules, and would gladly let him keep his Hylas. Your Glaucus may be like my Phaedra, but it is she whom I desire, not he."

"You haven't grasped what I mean," he resumed, "I'm not suggesting you should take Glaucus in her place, but simply that you should pretend to take him, in order to deceive Ariadne and let her believe, like everybody else, that Phaedra, whom you are carrying off, is Glaucus. Now listen, and follow me carefully. One of the customs of the island, and one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Minos himself instituted, is that the lover assumes complete charge of the child whom he covets, and takes him to live with him, under his roof, for two months; after which period the child must announce publicly whether or not his lover has given him satisfaction and treated him properly. To take the supposed Glaucus under your roof, you must put him aboard the ship which brought us here from Greece. Once we are all assembled, with the crypto-Phaedra safe in our hand, we must up-anchor; Ariadne will have to be there since she assumes that she will be going with you; then we shall put out with all speed to the open sea. The Cretans have a large fleet, but we shall have the legs of them, and if they give chase we can easily out-distance them. Tell Minos about his project. You may be sure that he'll smile on it, provided you let him believe that Glaucus, and not Phaedra, is involved; for, as for Glaucus, he could hardly hope to secure a better master and lover than yourself. But tell me: is Phaedra willing?"

"I don't know, as yet. Ariadne takes good care never to leave me alone with her, so that I've had no chance to sound her. . . . But I don't doubt that she will be ready to follow me, when she realizes that I prefer her to her sister."

It was Ariadne who had to be approached first. I took her into my confidence, but deceitfully of course, and according to our agreed procedure.

"What a wonderful plan!" she cried. "And how I shall enjoy traveling with my small brother! You've no idea how charming he can be. I get on very well with him and in spite of the difference in our ages I am still his favorite playmate. Nothing could be better for broadening his mind than to visit a foreign country. At Athens he can perfect his Greek, which he already speaks passably, though with a bad accent: that will soon be put right. You will set him the best of examples, and I only hope he will grow to be like you."

I let her talk. The wretched girl could not foresee what fate was in store for her.

Glaucus had also to be warned, lest any hitch should occur. Pirithöus took charge of this, and told me later that the boy was at first bitterly disappointed. Only after an appeal to his better sentiments did he decide to join in the game (or, I should rather say, to drop out of it and yield up his place to his sister). Phaedra had also to be informed. She might have started screaming if we had tried to abduct her by force, or by surprise. But Pirithöus exploited with great skill the malicious pleasure which both children would not fail to take in gulling their elders—Glaucus his parents, and Phaedra her sister.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phaedra duly rigged herself out in Glaucus' everyday clothes. The two were of exactly the same build, and when she had bound up her hair and muffled the lower part of her face, it was impossible for Ariadne not to mistake her identity.

It was certainly disagreeable for me to have to deceive Minos, who had lavished upon me every mark of his confidence, and had told me of the good influence which he expected me, as an older person, to have upon his son. And I was his guest, too. Of course I was abusing my position. But it was not, and indeed it is never, a part of my character to allow myself to be stopped by scruples. The voices of gratitude and decency were shouted down by the voice of desire. The end justifies the means. What must be, must be.

Ariadne was first on board, in her anxiety to secure comfortable quarters. As soon as Phaedra arrived we could make off. Her abduction took place not at nightfall, as had at first been agreed, but after the family dinner, at which she had insisted on appearing. She pleaded that as she had formed the habit of going to her room immediately after dinner her absence could not, she thought be remarked before the morning of the next day. So everything went off without a hitch, and I was able to disembark with Phaedra, a few days later, in Attica, having meanwhile dropped off her sister, the beautiful and tedious Ariadne, at Naxos.

I learnt on arriving at our territory that when Aegeus, my father, had seen in the distance the black sails (those same which I had omitted to change) he had hurled himself into the sea. I have already touched on this, in a few words; I dislike returning to it. I shall add, however, that I had dreamed, that last night of our voyage, that I was already King of Attica. Be that as it may, or as it might have been, this was, for the whole population and for myself, a day of rejoicing for our happy return and my promotion to the throne, and a day of mourning for the death of my father. I therefore gave orders that in the rites for the day lamentations should alternate with songs of joy; and in these songs and dances we took a prominent part—my companions, now so implausibly restored to their homes, and myself. Joy and desolation: it was fitting that the people should be made to explore, at one and the same time, these two extremes of feeling.

XI

People sometimes reproached me afterwards for my conduct towards Ariadne. They said I had behaved like a coward, and that I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should not have abandoned her, or at any rate not on an island. Possibly; but I wanted to put the sea between us. She was after me, hunting me down, marking me for the kill. When she got wind of my ruse, and detected her sister beneath her brother's clothes, she set up the devil's own noise, broke into a series of rhythmical screams, upbraided me for my treachery; and when, in my exasperation, I told her that I did not intend to take her further than the first island at which the wind, now suddenly risen, would allow or compel us to make landfall, she threatened me with a long poem which she proposed to write on the subject of this infamous desertion. I told her at once that she could not do better: the poem promised to be very good, as far as I could judge from her frenzied and lyrical tones; moreover it would serve as a distraction, and she would undoubtedly soon find in it the best solace for her grief. But all this only vexed her the more. Such are women, when one tries to make them see reason. For my part, I always allow myself to be guided by an instinct in which, by reason of its greater simplicity, I have perfect confidence.

The island in question was Naxos. One story has it that, some time after we had abandoned her, Dionysus went there to join her, and indeed married her; all of which may be a way of saying that she found consolation in drink. People say that on their wedding-day the god made her a present of a crown, the work of Hephaestus, which now forms one of the constellations; and that Zeus welcomed her on Olympus and made her immortal. She was even mistaken, they say, for Aphrodite. I let people talk; and myself, in order to cut short hostile rumors, did my best to confirm her divine rank by founding a cult in her honor. I also went out of my way to be the first to dance my reverences there. May I be allowed to remark that, but for my desertion, she would have enjoyed none of these great advantages?

Certain imaginary incidents have enriched the mythology of my person: the abduction of Helen, the descent into Hell with Pirithöus, the rape of Proserpine. I took care never to deny these rumors, for they all enhanced my prestige. I even improved upon some of them, in order to confirm the people in beliefs which they are all too inclined, in Attica, to discard. Popular emancipation is a good thing; irreverence quite another.

The truth is that after my return to Athens I remained faithful to Phaedra. I took both the woman and the city for my bride. I was a husband, and the son of a dead king: I was a king. My days of adventure are over, I used to repeat to myself; where I had sought to conquer, I now sought to rule.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This was not easy. Athens at that time really did not exist. In Attica a mass of petty townships disputed for predominance; whence continual brawling, besieging and strife. The essential thing was to secure a strong central unit of government—a thing which I obtained only with great difficulty. I brought both strength and cunning to the task.

Aegeus, my father, thought he could assure his own authority by perpetuating these quarrels. Considering, myself, that the well-being of the citizens is compromised by such discords, I traced the source of most of the evils to the general inequality of wealth and the desire to increase one's own fortune. Myself caring little for the acquisition of wealth, and preoccupied with the public good as much as, if not more than, with my own, I set an example of plain living. By an equal division of all properties, I abolished at one blow both the fact of supremacy and the rivalries which it had provoked. This was a drastic measure, which no doubt pleased the poor (the great majority, that is to say) but antagonized the rich, whom I had thereby dispossessed. These, though few in number, were clever men. I summoned the most important among them, and said:

"Personal merit is the only thing to which I attach any importance. I recognize no other scale of values. You have made yourselves rich by ingenuity, practical knowledge and perseverance; but also, and more often, by injustice and abuse. Your private rivalries are compromising the security of a state which I intend to be a great power, beyond the reach of your intrigues. Only thus will it be able to resist foreign invasion, and prosper. The accursed love of money which torments you does not bring you happiness, for one can truly call it insatiable. The more people have, the more they want. I shall, therefore, curtail your fortunes; and by force (I possess it) if you do not submit peaceably to the curtailment. For myself I shall keep only the preservation of the laws and the command of the army. I care very little for the rest. I mean to live, now that I am king, just as simply as I have lived hitherto, and in the same style as the humblest of my subjects. I shall see that the laws are respected, and that I myself am respected, if not feared. I mean to have it said among our neighbors that Attica is ruled not by a tyrant but by a government of the people; for each citizen of the state shall have an equal right to sit on the Council, irrespective of his birth. If you do not side willingly with all this I shall find ways, as I said, to compel you.

I shall raze and destroy utterly your little courts of local justice and your regional council-chambers, and I shall assemble, beneath the Acropolis, the capital city which already bears the name of Athenae.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And it is this name of Athens which, for the races of the future—and this I promise to the gods who show me favor—will be a name of wonders. I dedicate my city to Pallas. Now go, all of you, and take my words as meant."

Then, suiting my example to my words, I stripped myself of all royal authority, stepped back into the ranks, and was not afraid to show myself to the public without escort, like a simple citizen; but I gave my attention unceasingly to public affairs, maintaining peace and watching over the good order of the state.

Pirithöus, after hearing me address the men of wealth, said to me that he thought my speech sublime, but ridiculous. Because, he argued: "Equality is not natural among men; I would go farther and say that it is not desirable. It is a good thing that the superior men should rise above the vulgar mass to the full height of their eminence. Without emulation, rivalry and jealousy, the mob will be for ever a formless, stagnant, wallowing mass. There must be some leaven to make it rise; take care that it doesn't rise against yourself. Whether you like it or not, and although you may succeed in your wish, and achieve an initial levelling by which each man starts on the same plane and with an equal chance, yet differences of talent will soon bring about differences of station: in other words, a downtrodden people and an aristocracy."

"Good Gods!" That set me off again. "I certainly expect that, and I hope it won't be long in coming. But in the first place I don't see why the people should be downtrodden if the new aristocracy, to which I shall give all the support in my power, is, as I would have it, an aristocracy not of wealth, but of intellect."

And then, in order to increase the power and importance of Athens, I made it known that there would be an impartial welcome for everyone, no matter whence he came, who might choose to come and settle there. And criers were sent throughout the neighboring countries to carry this message: "Peoples all, make haste to Athens!"

The news spread far and wide. And was it not through this that Oedipus, the fallen monarch, saddest and noblest of wind-wrack, made his way from Thebes to Attica, there to seek help and protection, there to die? Because of which I was able later to secure for Athens the blessing which the gods had conferred on his ashes. Of this, I shall have more to say.

I promised to all newcomers indifferently the same rights as were enjoyed by those who were natives of Athens, or who had settled there earlier; any necessary discrimination could await the proofs of experience. For good tools reveal their quality only after use.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So that if I was later obliged none the less to admit differences among the Athenians (and consequently to admit a hierarchy) I allowed this only in order to ensure that the state would in general function better. Thus it is that, thanks to me, the Athenians came to deserve, among all the other Greeks, the fine name of "people," which was commonly bestowed upon them, and upon them only. There lies my fame—far surpassing that of my earlier feats: a fame to which neither Hercules attained, nor Jason, nor Bellerophon, nor Perseus.

Pirithöus, alas! the companion of my youthful exuberances, later fell away from me. All those heroes whom I have named, and others too, like Meleager and Peleus, never prolonged their career beyond their first feats, nor sometimes beyond a single one. For myself, I was not content with that. "There is a time for conquest," I used to say to Pirithöus, "a time for cleansing the earth of its monsters, and then a time for husbandry and the harvesting of well-cherished land; a time to set men free from fear, and then a time in which to find employment for their liberty, in which to profit by the moment of ease and coax it into bloom." And that could not be achieved without discipline: I would not admit that, as with the Boeotians, man should make himself his own boundary, or aim merely at a mediocre happiness. I thought that man was not, and would never be free, and that it would not be a good thing if he were. But I couldn't urge him forward without his consent: nor could I obtain that consent without leaving him (leaving the people at any rate) the illusion of liberty. I wanted to educate him. I would not allow him to become in any degree content with his lot, or to resign himself to furrow his brow in perpetuity. Humanity (such was always the cast of my thought) can do more and deserves better. I remembered the teaching of Daedalus, who wanted to enrich mankind with the spoils of the gods. My strength was that I believed in progress.

So Pirithöus and I parted company. In my youth he had been my constant companion, and often an invaluable aide. But I realized that constancy in friendship can prevent a man from advancing—can even pull him backwards; after a certain point one can only go forward alone. As Pirithöus was a man of sense, I still listened to what he said: but that was all. He was growing old, and whereas he had once been enterprise itself, he now allowed wisdom to degenerate into temperance. His advice was now always for restriction and restraint.

"Mankind isn't worth all this trouble," he would say. And I would reply "Well, what else is there to think about, except mankind? Man has not yet said his last word."

"Don't get excited," he used to reply. "Haven't you done enough?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now that the prosperity of Athens is assured, it is time for you to rest on your laurels and savor the happiness of married life."

He urged me to pay more attention to Phaedra, and there for once he was right. For I must now tell of how the peace of my fireside was disturbed, and what a hideous price was expected by the gods in return for my successes and my self-conceit.

XII

I had unlimited confidence in Phaedra. I had watched her grow more beautiful month by month. She was the very breath of virtue. I had withdrawn her at so early an age from the pernicious influence of her family that I never conceived she might carry within her a full dose of inherited poison. She obviously took after her mother, and when she later tried to excuse herself by saying that she was not responsible, or that she was foredoomed, I had to own that there was something in it. But that was not all: I also believe that she had too great a disdain for Aphrodite. The gods avenge themselves: and it was in vain that Phaedra later strove to appease the goddess with an added abundance of offerings and supplications. For Phaedra was pious, in spite of everything. In my wife's family everyone was pious. But is was no doubt regrettable that not everyone addressed his devotions to the same God. With Pasiphae, it was Zeus; with Ariadne, Dionysus. For my own part I reverenced above all Pallas Athene, and next Poseidon, to whom I was bound by a secret tie, and who, unfortunately for me, had similarly bound himself always to hear, and always to answer my prayers. My most beloved son, whose mother had been Antiope, and whom I set above all the others, devoted himself to Artemis the huntress. He was as chaste as she—as chaste as I, at his age, had been dissolute. He used to run naked through moonlit woods and thickets; detested the court, and formal parties, and, above all, the society of women; was only happy when, with his bear-hounds, he could go hunting for wild beasts and follow them to the topmost mountain or the last recesses of a valley. Often, too, he broke in wild horses, tamed them upon the seashore, or rode them at a full gallop into the sea. How I loved him then! Proud, handsome, and unruly: not to me whom he held in veneration, nor to my laws: but he despised the conventions which prevent a man from asserting himself and wear out his merits in futility. He it was whom I wanted for my heir. I could have slept quietly, once the reins of State were in his unsullied hands; for I knew that he would be as inaccessible to threats as to flatteries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That Phaedra might fall in love with him I realized only too late. I should have foreseen it, for he was very like me. (I mean, like what I had been at his age.) But I was already growing old, and Phaedra was still astonishingly young. She may still have loved me, but it was as a young girl loves her father. It is not good, as I have learned to my cost, that there should be such a difference of age between husband and wife. Yet what I could not forgive her was not her passion (natural enough, after all, though half-incestuous) but that, when she realized she could not satisfy her desire, she should have accused my Hippolytus, and imputed to him the impure longings which were consuming her. I was a blind father, and a too trustful husband. I believed her. For once in my life I took a woman at her word! I called down the vengeance of the god upon my innocent son. And my prayer was heard. Men do not realize, when they address themselves to the gods, that if their prayers are answered it is most often for their misfortune. By a sudden, passionate, mindless impulse I had killed my son. And I am still inconsolable. That Phaedra, awakened to her guilt, should at once afterwards have wrought justice upon herself—well and good. But now that I cannot count even upon the friendship of Pirithöus, I feel lonely; and I am old.

Oedipus, when I welcomed him at Colonus, had been driven from Thebes, his fatherland: without eyes, dishonored and wretched as he was, he at least had his two daughters with him, and in their constant tenderness he found relief from his sufferings. He had failed in every part of what he had undertaken. I have succeeded. Even the enduring blessing which his ashes are to confer upon the country where they are laid—even this will rest, not upon his ungrateful Thebes, but upon Athens.

I am surprised that so little should have been said about this meeting of our destinies at Colonus, this moment at the crossroads when our two careers confronted each other. I take it to have been the summit and the crown of my glory. Till then I had forced all life to do obeisance to me, and had seen all my fellowmen bow in their turn (excepting only Daedalus; but he was my senior by many years. Besides, even Daedalus gave me best in the end.) In Oedipus alone did I recognize a nobility equal to my own. His misfortunes could only enhance his grandeur in my eyes. No doubt I had triumphed everywhere and always; but on a level which, in comparison with Oedipus, seemed to me merely human —inferior, I might say. He had held his own with the Sphinx; had stood man upright before the riddle of life, and dared to oppose him to the gods. How then, and why, had he accepted defeat? By putting out his eyes, had he not even contributed to it? There was something, in this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dreadful act of violence against himself, which I could not contrive to understand. I told him of my bewilderment. But his explication, I must admit, did not satisfy me at all—or else I did not fully understand it.

"True," he said, "I yielded to an impulse of rage—one which could only be directed against myself; against whom else could I have turned? In face of the immeasurable horror of the accusations I had just discovered, I felt an overwhelming desire to make a protest. And besides, what I wanted to destroy was not so much my eyes themselves as the canvas they held before me; the scenery before which I was struggling, the falsehood in which I no longer believed; and this so as to break through to reality.

"And yet, no! I was not really thinking of anything very clearly; I acted rather by instinct. I put out my eyes to punish them for having failed to see the evidence which had, as people say, been staring me in the face. But to speak the truth . . . ah! how can I put it to you? . . . Nobody understood me when I suddenly cried out 'O darkness, my light!' And you also, you don't understand it—I feel that distinctly. People heard it as a cry of grief; it was a statement of fact. It meant that in my darkness I had found a source of supernatural light, illumining the world of the spirit. It meant: 'Darkness, thou art henceforth my light.' And at the moment when the blue of the sky went black before me, my inward firmament became bright with stars."

He was silent, and for some moments remained deep in meditation. Then he went on:

"As a young man, I passed for one who could see the future. I believed it myself, too. Was I not the first, the only man to solve the riddle of the Sphinx? Only since my eyes of flesh were torn with my own hand from the world of appearances have I begun, as it seems to me, to see reality. Yes: at the moment when the outer world was hidden for ever from the eyes of my body, a kind of new eyesight opened out, within myself, upon the infinite perspectives of an inner world, which the world of appearances (the only one which had existed for me until that time) had led me to disdain. And this imperceptible world (inaccessible, I mean, to our senses) is, as I now know, the only true one. All the rest is an illusion, a deception moreover, which disturbs our contemplation of what is Divine. Tiresias the blind sage once said to me 'Who wishes to see God must first cease to see the world.' And I didn't understand him then; just as you, yourself, O Theseus, do not understand me now."

"I shall not attempt to deny," I replied, "the importance of this world beyond temporal things of which your blindness has made you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aware; but what I still cannot understand is why you oppose it to the outer world in which we live and act."

"Because," said Oedipus, "for the first time, when with my inward eye I perceived what was formerly hidden from me, I suddenly became aware of this fact; that I had based my earthly sovereignty upon a crime, and that everything which followed from this was in consequence tainted; not merely all my personal decisions, but even those of the two sons to whom I had abandonded my crown—for I at once stepped down from the slippery eminence to which my crime had raised me. You must know already to what new villainies my sons have allowed themselves to stoop, and what an ignominious doom hangs over all that our sinful humanity may engender; of this my unhappy sons are no more than a signal example. For, as the fruits of an incestuous union, they are no doubt doubly branded; but I believe that there is an original stain of some sort afflicts the whole human race, in such a way that even the best bear its stripe, and are vowed to evil and perdition; from all this man can never break free without divine aid of some sort, for that alone can wash away his original sin and grant him amnesty."

He was silent again for a few moments, as if preparing to plunge still deeper, and then went on:

"You are astonished that I should have put out my eyes. I am astonished myself. But in this gesture, inconsidered and cruel as it was, there may yet be something else: an indefinable secret longing to follow my fortunes to their farthest limit, to give the final turn of the screw to my anguish, and to bring to a close the destiny of a hero. Perhaps I dimly foresaw the grandeur of suffering and its power to redeem; that is why the true hero is ashamed to turn away from it. I think that it is in fact the crowning proof of his greatness; and that he is never worthier than when he falls a victim; then does he exact the gratitude of heaven, and disarm the vengeance of the gods. Be that as it may, and however deplorable my mistakes may have been, the state of unearthly beatitude which I have been able to reach is an ample reward for all the ills that I have to suffer—but for them, indeed, I should doubtless never have achieved it."

"Dear Oedipus," I said, when it was plain that he had finished speaking, "I can only congratulate you on the kind of superhuman wisdom which you profess. But my thoughts can never march with yours along that road. I remain a child of this world, and I believe that man, be he what he may, and with whatever blemishes you judge him to be stained, is in duty bound to play out his hand to the end. No doubt you have learnt to make good use even of your misfor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tunes, and through them have drawn nearer to what you call the divine world. I can well believe, too, that a sort of benediction now attaches to your person, and that it will presently be laid, as the oracles have said, upon the land in which you will take your everlasting rest."

I did not add that what mattered to me was that this blessing should be laid upon Attica; and I congratulated myself that the god had made Thebes abut on to my country.

If I compare my lot with that of Oedipus, I am content. I have fulfilled my destiny. Behind me I leave the city of Athens. It has been dearer to me even than my wife and son. My city stands. After I am gone, my thoughts will live on there for ever. Lonely and consenting, I draw near to death. I have enjoyed the good things of the earth, and I am happy to think that after me, and thanks to me, men will recognize themselves as being happier, better and more free. I have worked always for the good of those who are to come. I have lived.

(Translated from the French by John Russell)

(This translation of Theseus *is published in* PARTISAN REVIEW *by arrangement with New Directions, who will bring out soon, a deluxe, limited edition of the book, set and printed by hand on hand paper, for sale in America. It will be limited to two-hundred copies, and will contain twelve original lithographs by the Italian artist, Massimo Campigli.)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAGALL

RECENT WORKS
THROUGH NOVEMBER 27

PIERRE MATISSE
41 EAST 57th ST. NEW YORK

MAUD MORGAN

RECENT PAINTINGS
Nov. 8 - Nov. 27

BETTY PARSONS
GALLERY - 15 East 57th Street

MOSAICS
by

JEANNE REYNAL

opening Tuesday, Oct. 26
through Nov. 20

JULIEN LEVY GALLERY
42 East 57 Street

12th ANNUAL EXHIBITION
of

OLD MASTER
DRAWINGS
Nov. 9 - 27

Durlacher Brothers
11 East 57 Street

LOUISA MATTHIASDOTTIR

OCT. 18
NOV. 9

JANE ST. GALLERY
760 MADISON AVE., N. Y.

HOURS
1 - 5.30

NOV. 11 - NOV 30

ALBERT KRESCH

JANE ST. GALLERY
760 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK

1948 Season Exhibitions

ALBERS
NOGUCHI
HILLSMITH
deKOONING
SISKIND

EGAN GALLERY, 63 E. 57

LAUREL GALLERY

NEW AND LARGER GALLERIES
108 East 57 Street

PETERDI • Nov.
Andre' Racz • Dec.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FIAT LUCE!

B. Let's think of the magazine out of context for a moment, as a *ding an sich*. You'll have to admit it's a primitive organism, a sort of non-cellular, multinucleate, promiscuous growth like the slime molds that only need liquid refreshment to go on forever.

A. You flatter us! Yes, I'll grant it's often been pretty squalid on the big issues. But even your slime mold renews itself. We have our primeval, Kronos element, the Founding Fathers who were admittedly barbarians, and we have our younger gods who will eventually make peace with Prometheus.

B. O spare us thy peace!

A. Now you're simply being heretical. Youth is in the saddle and rides man. To the small businessman and schoolteacher we are the Universal Reason, uttering our oracles with the homely narrow truculence of Dad. To the aspiring urbanite we are a clearing-house for all the current innuendo and Housmanesque attitudinizing. A newsmagazine can be only a very thin slice above the press that feeds it.

B. Or the people who read it.

A. We are the people, and wisdom shall die with us.

B. But the bland arrogance! If I should ever merit your attention for committing sodomy or the like, as a Marxist of sorts I would be sure to appear as "penguin-figured B," or "puffy, pointless B." I counted twenty-three uses of the adjective "little" in this week's issue and nineteen of them described the persons or families of the political or spiritual left wing. This refutation-by-physique is a weird pseudo-psychological hypochondria that's come over you people.

A. We are *the* People. . . .

B. The devil you are! Ye are the Power, and ye care principally to "cover your number," as we used to say in the Navy. To someone who only has a modest stake in that power it rubs to be presided over by a vast, ogling, aggressively paternal Indifference.

A. Look, my son, son—your ideals are worthy of you. I seem to have heard them from less worthy mouths. Why do you torture yourself with our magazine?

B. No, seriously, if freedom is any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

issue, you were as free not to work for it as I am free not to read it. Admit that your boss has the narrowest kind of Wall Street-Presbyterian-turned liberal mind.

A. Granted.

B. And, as a patron of Christian Free Enterprise, he has conducted delicate political maneuvers that have made thousands such as you and I quietly ill.

A. Quite true, with reservations. There's no such thing as a politically neutral journal. You can probably say that the boss hears as much good advice as bad during the course of a day.

B. And when the late president gave what was for these times a devastating speech at the beginning of his last campaign, you people had to congratulate the ghost-writer for his cleverness, or the six old-fashioneds hidden behind the flowers for the president's good humor. One thing you can do very well —play on every little fear and inhibition of the provincial reader.

A. Come on now—this is routine political strategy. You're muckraking.

B. And when Britain's labor leaders have a conference at Margate, how pious! "What would

LISTEN, LITTLE MAN by Wilhelm REICH, illus. by Wm. Steig 3.00

SARTRE, Jean-P. ANTI SEMITE AND JEW 2.75

WILSON, Edmund. THE TRIPLE THINKERS 4.00

SITWELL, Edith. SONG OF THE COLD. *poems* 2.75

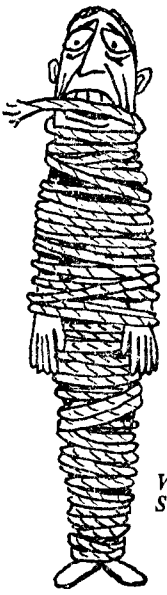
4 more reasons for patronizing **4** seasons

PICASSO, The Recent Years by Janis pub. 7.50 with us 3.50

STENDHAL by Matthew Josephson pub. 4.00 with us 1.00

TYLER Parker MAGIC & MYTH OF THE MOVIES pub. 3.50 with us 1.00

BAREA, Arturo THE FORGING OF A REBEL pub. 5.00 with us 1.00



Wm. Steig

4 seasons — books

21 Greenwich Ave. New York 14
Chelsea 2-0500 open 1 to 10:30

write for our catalog

Only you yourself can be your liberator!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be the outcome of these broils between materialists . . . ?" I quote. Now that we've persuaded ourselves that our American necks are finally in mortal danger, we're off on a crusade to save "Western Man," loosely defined as one of you editors just down from Yale. Man of the Renaissance! If you people only had some of even Machiavelli's spirit!

A. All right, if we are to talk history, you may call us the official organ of the trading-manufacturing class. No other class wants or needs such an organ. We have our affiliates, of course, the journals of science, philosophy, literature, and religion. We tap them for a specialist and out he pops, all rhetoric and smiles.

B. Let me get at it this way. Once we had what you might call "men of spirit," men whose favorite element was moral and spiritual danger. The attitude is one, if the possible predicaments are many. All I see now are "liberators," kindly old Viennese doctors and nuclear physicists whose political remarks sound like bad *PM*. We have "artists" and "idea-men." Ideas make things work, solve problems, and art gets along on what it can scrape up around the edges. So the modern writer must adopt the myth of total alienation, when he is only suffering from alienation from the minimum respect the non-professional man of spirit deserves in the community.

A. If we are discussing journalism, let's stay within the given. No warmed-over Henry Adams or Waldo Frank, please. You're romanticizing; the question is bigger than this. Your "man of spirit" is dead. At best he was an uneasy equilibrium looking for a way out. Kafka is perhaps his last unmistakable voice, grown almost too faint to be heard. They all said roughly the same thing—*better not to have been born*—too expensive a kind of wisdom, don't you think, ultimately? The author of Job (that wonderfully blasphemous Pharisee), Sophocles, Plato, Shakespeare. . . . Socrates looked for a way out through education but didn't find it. There was no structure of human happiness written into things. Socrates only prepared his part of the world for Christ, and Christ was the final, the "secure torment," to quote Miss Barnes whom you admire. Christ was too much—Nietzsche's only example of the Superman, as a matter of fact. We like to forget that. God may not be mocked, but he mocked us. So what comes next in our capsule Pageant of the Ages?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

B. Renaissance Man!—a bit sloppy all around, but LOYAL; a little suspicious of long-hairs, but a GOOD GUY. You people got hold of the machines and began to breed!

A. "You people" indeed! From what immaculate conception do you liberals emanate? The machine is only a moral compromise, a frozen formula. No artist has succeeded in scaring the public with a machine until it was put in human form. It's Stalin and not the atom bomb we're afraid of. Emerson, Thoreau, and Henry Adams ranted about the Machine because most of the time they were political sentimentalists.

B. Keep the Machine, then, but spirit involves a good deal more than politics.

A. Of course it does, but who was it but you nondescript liberals who taught us how to make your whole business of "spirit" slightly ridiculous, starting with the Hegelian abstract rubber-stamp, down through your "Man's Fate," your "Integral Humanism," and so on. If we are all stuck with this magazine I work for, it's because the "Man," whom you imagine you can snatch out of history by capitalizing his name, made a corporate decision against his "higher possibilities," his "dignity," and all the rest. Dignity

YALE

FRANZ KAFKA

An Interpretation of His Works

By HERBERT TAUBER. This book, originally published in Switzerland, is widely recognized as the most penetrating study of Kafka's work yet to appear. Now translated from the German, it is based on the sum total of Kafka's writings, with each of his works examined in detail. With a thoroughness and knowledge that bring seemingly unrelated and distorted episodes into focus, Mr. Tauber investigates the baffling symbolism and myriad complexities of writings that today exert a great influence on the English-speaking world.

$3.75

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

A Biography by RANDALL STEWART. In contrast to earlier interpretations of Hawthorne's somber character Randall Stewart portrays the lovable human being that is actually revealed in the *Journals*. "A sound, scholarly and objective book . . . Mr. Stewart's portrait leaves a final impression that Hawthorne was that rare combination, both a dedicated artist and a fine and likable person. Like all good biographies of writers, it should stimulate its readers to turn again to the works of its subject."—ORVILLE PRESCOTT, *N. Y. Times*.

$4.00

At all bookstores

Yale University Press

Publishers of
The Yale Review
New Haven, Conn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

involved pain of a high order, restraint, and one-track minds, whereas the human mind moves naturally toward ease, freedom, and multiplicity.

B. So begins the Century of the Common Sense. We all start grubbing for roots or rooting for grubs, as the case may be. But what happens if we get bored with our Laws of Nature?

A. It's the old liberal dodge to cry "greed" or "vapid scientific curiosity." We do it ourselves now —very effective, too. My boss and the Inquisitor's descendants are quite thick these days. No, the "distinctively human," which you lump together as Spirit, was exploited out of a sense of adventure. That sense is gone now. When Kenneth Burke calls for a new American Imperial myth to match the myth of Augustan Rome, nobody can take him seriously, much as we might like to. Your manias of intensification reached dazzling climaxes at various times, but it was always an equilibrium, never absolute achievement. Culture is a degree of vitality, not a species of value-engineering, as many of you seem to think.

B. Pardon me, then, if I don't understand where your "secure torment" fits in.

A. He seems to have been the explosion of the whole dignity notion into a more difficult mode of existence. His shadow has been too long for the Church and its pathos of time.

B. He was not the last man of spirit, though. You've said so yourself.

A. No, he wasn't. There continued to be revolts, spontaneous efforts to emerge from the shadow. But your friends, Toynbee's "creative minority," if you like, weren't able to keep it up. For generations they had been shouting, "Come on men, the summit is over the next rise," but finally the so-called summit was reached. It was rather cold and barren; the men began thinking of home at the bottom. They felt duped, and nobody had the energy to stop the fighting that had gone on among them as they competed for first place in the ascent. So down they went, your friends marching along resolutely with the others—only backwards.

B. See here, you're not falling for Toynbee's line, are you?

A. No, certainly not all of it—only for my metaphor's sake. Your current Great Historian is often your popular poet. But Toynbee can break into a sweat of inconsistent hopes that make my boss look like an angel of honesty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

B. Well, *do* they go back up the mountain or not?

A. Perhaps, but they're not quite at the bottom yet, I believe. Let's drop the image; here's the point. We are an animal that hates coercion but must do everything together. At only two periods are there two really conflicting factions—before the start of the adventure and at its end. If you find almost no opposition now, it may explain why my boss can afford to be so bland and patronizing. The Human Race, meaning the noisier part of it, decided for the time being that it wanted to be engineers and not saints.

B. What about Huxley and his crew?

A. They're household saints and don't affect the situation.

B. Well, you haven't lost yourself in your job, have you? Or else your magazine would not be such a monument to fear.

A. Of course not. You apparently have to talk in absolutes. A "healthy" amount of fear is one of our virtues. We've given up absolutes in principle; that's part of the bargain. Your fashionable "little magazines," which in some respects pretend to hate our guts, are usually with us in the big things. They intensify the cry for "objectivity" and "reliable analyses," as if the end-result of a true scientific investigation must always be to dissolve the possibility of absolute truth. So our naturalism only means loyalty to the engineer's convention—the mechanical, the social, the political, and the artistic engineer.

B. This all sounds like a hoax to me. How can you work believing it?

R. W. Flint

by ALLEN TATE

On the Limits of Poetry:

Selected Essays

Tate's most important essays over 20 years, written in what Mark Van Doren has called: "prose as concentrated, as passionate, as irreducible as good poetry is." $4.00

THE SWALLOW PRESS AND WILLIAM MORROW & CO.
425 Fourth Avenue
New York City 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

L'AFFAIRE MATTHIESSEN

Sirs:

The fact that your review of my book *From the Heart of Europe* was virtually indistinguishable from the one in *Time* should be of more concern to PARTISAN REVIEW than it is to me. But I must ask the courtesy of your columns to correct a defamation of the group of students who composed the American Seminar at Salzburg. Your reviewer refers to them as "a gang of future culture commissars," whereas my text makes clear—and you can verify it from anyone else who was there—that out of the whole group of over a hundred from sixteen different countries there were only three or four who were sympathetic with Communism.

F. O. Matthiessen

Boston, Mass.

REPLY

Sirs:

Mr. Matthiessen's initial remark shows how Stalinized his thinking has become. Instead of answering my arguments, he indulges in the hoary fellow-traveler device of equating the views of those who, for a variety of reasons, disagree with him; the anti-Stalinist left thus becoming "virtually indistinguishable" from the conservative right. Might it not be more to the point to note that my review was "virtually indistinguishable" from the one in The Nation *by Franz Hoellering, a European socialist?*

Matthiessen's book does not make clear that only a few Salzburg students were "sympathetic with Communism"; his writing is so imbued with the fellow-travelers' tone that anyone reading it (e.g., pp. 30-33*) might well gain the impression, as I did, that the bulk of the Salzburg students were Stalinists or fellow-travelers. Still, I was at fault in extending this impression into an unqualified statement.*

By doing so, I may have led some unwary readers to conclude that Alfred Kazin, also a teacher at Salzburg, shares Matthiessen's views. Since I know that Kazin, as an anti-Stalinist, rejects those views, I wish to state that I regret exceedingly any embarrassment or harm my unqualified reference to his role at Salzburg may have caused him.

My isolated factual error should not deflect anyone from the fact that, if not in Salzburg, then in Prague—and in his book above all—Matthiessen associated himself politically with "a gang of future culture commissars." Though ready to rise in indignation about a quite tangential point, he remains mum about the vastly consequential center of my attack: that he is an apologist for a brutal totalitarian state and its agents.

Irving Howe

Princeton, New Jersey

VOTE OF APPROVAL

Sirs:

Here is one vote of approval for the review of F. O. Matthiessen in the October PR. I hope there are a great many more. It is distressing for the liberal position that the views expressed in the article are not universally accepted. Our values and faith rest on the view that facts are facts. Mr. Matthiessen and a great many other "liberals" seem incapable of taking this view nowadays.

Your statement strikes a blow for the liberal values.

Bernard Barber

Northampton, Massachusetts

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OLD AND NEW POSTURES

Sirs:

Perhaps *Horizon* is not always to be had by those in America who read *Partisan Review*; else Mr. Greenberg could not have nerved himself so to misreport (PR, May, 1948) my *Horizon* article about the new English "romanticism." The new English romanticism. Just so. An article on, as they say, the "situation" in painting, now, in England. Yet Mr. Greenberg rocket-guns me with his deadly clichés for having, it seems, made a totalitarian, total, petulant attack on "modernism" in the arts. I was immediately criticizing not Picasso, not Klee, nor Matisse, nor Moore, nor Miro, for example, but two English painters who are neither of them abstract or surrealist. I was critisizing them because, turning a little away from various living painters older than themselves and various surviving modes as if recognising in them a deficiency, they paint as with a more "human" import, as with more of subject, as with a more viable end, *when in fact the end is individual, or chiefly of the moment.* Sutherland, I maintained, reduces his natural objects of life and matter to a self-concerned picturising of death and matter disorganised, while Piper puts down a nostalgia for a dying life agreeable to the aristocratic and upper middle class purchasers of his paintings of English mansions and churches and so on in picturesque decay. Poor ends helping to beget trivial means.

So much I was immediately criticizing. Certainly I referred to M. Gide and to that scholar Mr. Greenberg nicely mentions as "the late Coomaraswamy." I indeed remarked again that we have now had in our time too much means in painting, too much of the simple painter rather than of the *man* painting. "Remarked again" because the statement, if not by now a European commonplace, has frequently been remarked positively or by implication by many besides myself who are more than critics or writers and who are not by any means acceptable to the VOKS Bulletin or to its M. Kemenov. To introduce M. Kemenov, to bully me to final bits with M. Kemenov, Mr. Greenberg writes that I call for "*common* universal humanity in contemporary painting and sculpture." I called for the human and the universal, but who said "common" except Mr. Greenberg? Can what is human and universal not be, alas, all too uncommon; and would that which, most rare in its occurrence, excels, not also be most essentially human and so universal to all the best of men? Why must Mr. Greenberg assume that I meant not the humanity and universality of the master, but the sub-humanity and mob-equivalence of the oiliest Soviet academician glorifying Stalin or the glossiet American, or English, advertising artist glorifying brassieres?

Critically in his big words, Mr. Greenberg throws nothing back except, many, many years after, the old aesthetic of Clive Bell, the old "significant form" translated into his jargon; nothing but all old masters being masters really by abstraction. So Goya and Chardin, Rembrandt and Klee possess us by variations of a single element common in all their work, all severally have been deluded by any spirituality they have nourished or by any antique notion that their means were *not* independent of all of which their intellect and passion and nature and education had convinced them. How much easier for all the Greenbergs to continue irresponsible, how much easier to be a scratched old gramophone record repeating over and over in a groove the one formula! Seen from this distance Mr. Greenberg appears the petrified revolutionary, the simpleton stuck in an old posture, stuck in an idealised, idolized *Museum of Modern Art,* in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOTHAM BOOK MART

41 West 47th St., New York 19, N. Y.

BOWEN (Elizabeth) DEATH OF THE HEART. 3.00

GREENE (Graham) THE HEART OF THE MATTER. 3.00

PRITCHETT (V. S.) THE LIVING NOVEL. Some personalized assessments of standard authors. 2.75

Others by above authors including Out-of-Print titles.

A CELEBRATION FOR EDITH SITWELL. A symposium on her work in honor of her visit here, with Sir Osbert Sitwell. 1.50

SITWELL (Edith) A SONG OF THE COLD. Poems.

SITWELL (Osbert) LAUGHTER IN THE NEXT ROOM. Vol. IV in brilliant autobiography. 4.00

A limited number of above titles, and others in stock, autographed.

MANN (Thomas) DR. FAUSTUS. Important new novel. 3.75

THE MAXIMS OF MARCEL PROUST. Selected by Justin O'Brien. 3.00

LAWRENCE - RUSSELL CORRESPONDENCE. Ed. by Harry T. Moore. Connected series of letters recording a controversy between two contrasting thinkers. 5.00

WOODCOCK (George) THE WRITER & POLITICS. Essays on Greene, Koestler, Warner, Kafka, other subjects. 4.20

Send for the GBM AUTUMN CURRENTS including gift suggestions & the best from the fall lists of American & British publishers.

A list of books of Writing & Literature will also be mailed on request. James T. Farrell's "The Fate of Writing in America" 25 cents

which all the exhibits are correct, inviolately, for ever, and cannot be criticised. Because the avant garde (like the Cominform) must be right, always. Because nothing can be *said*, and all (recent) expression, or setting forth, therefore, as well as all experience, must be sanctified.

Geoffrey Grigson

Swindon, England

REPLY

I am sorry that I seem to have upset Mr. Grigson so much, but nothing in his rejoinder offers any evidence that I misunderstood or distorted the meaning of his article in *Horizon*. And besides he does say that I am wrong in any case, whether I misunderstood him or not.

When I objected to his call for "humanity" and "universality" in art it was not because I assumed he meant the banality of "socialist realism" or commercial art, but because what he meant by "humanity" and "universality" was academicism. The rest of his article and his rejoinder both bear me out in this interpretation. There is a great difference between the elevated academicism Mr. Grigson wants—or has got himself into a confusion about—and the debased variety sponsored in the Soviet Union; but they are both academism in the end.

All the people, distinguished or otherwise, who have preceded Mr. Grigson in complaining about modern art because of its lack of "viable ends" and "human import," because of its too great concern with "means" as against "subject," and so forth, demonstrated only that they did not know what painting and sculpture are about. The nonsense in the second sentence of the last paragraph of Mr. Grigson's rejoinder is a particularly appalling example of this kind of ignorance—or should I say lack of experience?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes I am a petrified revolutionary (though I do not think modern art so revolutionary). And Clive Bell was not so wrong, even if he did disastrously over-simplify his thesis and fail, perhaps, to understand it completely himself. In matters of art I prefer any day to stand with the generation of 1905-1920 rather than with Mr. Grigson's and my own, even at the cost of being a simpleton and an old phonograph record.

Clement Greenberg

HEIDEGGER'S RECORD

Sirs:

"I read the report, "On Meeting A Philosopher" in P.R. (April 1948).

I, also, have met this "philosopher" —have met him many a time: In the lecture room, in the home of his Jewish teacher and sponsor, Edmund Husserl, in the large auditorium where he had assembled the whole University teaching staff from the youngest assistant to the oldest "Geheimrat," I have met him later in the little Black Forest village of Todtnauberg, and, finally, I met him "by correspondence" some time before I left the Third Reich.

One could not call all these occasions "meeting a philosopher," but I do not hesitate to admit that they contributed to my thinking; and, accepting the statement that "the proper study of mankind is man," Herr Heidegger has certainly given me some opportunity to indulge in such study.

In the lecture room the then young Privatdozent Heidegger was—as it is only too befitting—a keen and sometimes rather overzealous exponent of his master's "Phenomenology." In Husserl's home he was the devoted and attentive assistant to a man who in his great kindness and tolerance was even beyond reprimanding Heidegger's "hu-

anti-semite
and jew

by

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

A brilliant,
critical analysis of both.
$2.75 at all bookstores

SCHOCKEN BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man, all too human" flattery. Husserl smiled—he should not have done so, and his eyes were grave when, many years afterwards, he heard of Heidegger's rectorial address to the full meeting of the University staff in 1933.

Von Möllendorff, the famous anatomist, was Rector when Hitler came into power; he courageously resigned when he saw that all his protests and efforts to protect the freedom of learning were of no avail. The acting Rector, Professor Sauer, Dean of the Catholic Faculty, disgustedly refused to carry on—none of the other chairholders was prepared to lend his hand to the destruction of the idea and ideals of learning and teaching for which our Alma Mater then still stood. Christ's words *"Die Wahrheit wird Euch frei machen"* were engraved in golden letters over the main portal of our University building.—

And Judas came—"short and stocky, his hair thick and jet black."

Professor Heidegger came and accepted from the Nazi-Gauleiter Wagner the Rectorship of The University of Freiburg. And then he assembled all of us; and in his inaugural address he did not "disappear behind his words"—he strutted well in front of them; he was not "afraid of them"—with a bodyguard of uniformed Nazis there was no need to be afraid; his voice was not "subdued and quiet," not a "continuous whisper"—it was loud and arrogant, and, when it whispered, (I can still hear it) it was vicious and full of hatred. How he, the disciple of a Jew, how he hated them—how Judas must have hated Christ! And he did not read "closely from his typescript," and none of us was aware or felt that Heidegger was conscious of this "last leap and its consequences."

WE LIVE IN CONSTANT
FEAR OF DISCOVERY . . .

giving voice to the new—

1260

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To use a rather vulgar expression, which, in this case, is rather more descriptive than a philosophical one: for Heidegger Nazism was "a sure bet." "Consequences" didn't bother Herr Heidegger—then! Still, my memory of this meeting is not that of unopposed Evil. There was one man—I wish you could meet him one day; it would be worth your while to write a report "On Meeting a Man"—a man who spoke "serene and quiet" and by no means in a whisper: Professor Spemann, the Nobel-prize biologist. None of the many hundred who had to be present at the Rector's meeting will ever forget Spemann's voice, the "Voice of Learning and its inner Freedom"! I wonder if Heidegger remembers this voice, and if that isn't perhaps one of the reasons why now he whispers?

My further meetings with the "philosopher" have no general significance. After I was somewhat forcibly retired from my University position I went to live with friends—peasants—in Todtnauberg. The philosopher, during his weekends and holidays, often accompanied by some selected S.S.-uniformed "disciples," preferred to avoid meeting me; as the paths are small in those parts of the Black Forest, he chose the "about turn"—military commands were not foreign to the Nazi-Rector. So it's probably not even quite correct to speak here about "meeting a philosopher." As to my "correspondence-meeting"—I still have in my posession the documents which prove that Heidegger, even as a mighty Nazi-Rector, could be compelled by a single, dismissed and rather junior person and against his philosophical eva-

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRUTINY
Edited by Eric Bentley

The representative best critical essays that have appeared in the magazine SCRUTINY in its sixteen years of publication.
In his introduction Mr. Bentley says: "While literary people followed the fashion of the decade—Cynicism in the Twenties, Marxism in the Thirties, Existentialism and Crisis Theology in the Forties—SCRUTINY kept up a steady fire against the cliques, both academic and metropolitan." $5.75

EDUCATION and the UNIVERSITY
By F. R. Leavis

Dr. Leavis, of Downing College, Cambridge, discusses the problems of humane education in a world where the demands for specialists are making it difficult for citizens to acquire a mature sense of values that can be applied to the problems of civilization. $2.75

REVALUATION
By F. R. Leavis

". . . one of the most sustained and intelligent attacks on the problem of criticism, in the Arnoldian sense . . . in our lifetime."—Arthur Mizener in *The Kenyon Review.* $3.75

EXPLORATIONS
By L. C. Knights

"Contemporary criticism needs more books as intelligent and rewarding as this one."—Theodore Spencer in *The Saturday Review.* $3.00

GEORGE W. STEWART, Publisher, Inc., 109 E. 39th St., N. Y. 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

siveness to a "subdued and quiet" admission that it was only on principles of Nazi-doctrine and not on any professional failings that I was dismissed from the University. He may still have to acknowledge the signature he set under this "academic" document—and I am sure that he will do it with the same irresponsible servility this "philosopher" has shown to every new master in the past.

Why do I write these painful reminiscences? Because I feel that people like Heidegger, people driven by their morbid vanity and an equally morbid lack of intellectual and moral responsibility, have been the Quislings of the German Universities! These people have been the real destroyers of the best in German learning, science and culture which they delivered and betrayed to the barbarous, unscientific and anti-cultural Nazi Weltanschauung. It was those traitors of truth and freedom who paved the way for Hitler's regime and its ruthless annihilation of human values and lives.

In the name of all decency and honor,
In the name of all who were sacrificed to the Nazi-Moloch,
In the name of all men of "good will"
I accuse Martin Heidegger
of treason against Humanity
of the blackest treason possible,

BACK ISSUES OF PR

now available at reduced prices—30c each (regular price 50c)
Any four of the following for $1.00

☐ **JANUARY 1948:** Arthur Kostler—**London Letter;** Marcel Proust— **Filial Sentiments of a Parricide;** Melvin J. Lasky—**Report on the German Intelligentsia.**

☐ **FEBRUARY 1948:** Mary McCarthy—**The Cicerone;** Saul Bellow—**A Letter from Spain;** Robert Warshow—**The Gangster as Tragic Hero.**

☐ **MARCH 1948:** Delmore Schwartz—**The World is a Wedding;** Rene Leibowitz—**Schönberg and Stravinsky;** Clement Greenberg—**The Decline of Cubism.**

☐ **APRIL 1948:** André Malraux and James Burnham—**The Double Crisis** (a dialogue); Lionel Trilling—**Sex and Science: The Kinsey Report;** Irving Howe—**Sherwood Anderson: The Unavailable Self.**

☐ **MAY 1948:** Philip Rahv—**Disillusionment and Socialism;** Josephine Herbst —**Miss Porter and Miss Stein;** Nicolas Nabokov—**The Cult of Atonality;** Weldon Kees—**Muskrat Ramble.**

☐ **JUNE 1948:** Jean-Paul Sartre—**Communism and Literature;** Leslie Fiedler —**an American Myth of Love;** Anatole Broyard—**Portrait of the Hipster.**

☐ **JULY 1948:** Jean Cocteau—**The Human Voice;** Hannah Arendt—**The Concentration Camps;** Nicola Chiaromonte—**Malraux and the Demons of Action.**

PARTISAN REVIEW, 1545 Broadway, New York 19

I enclose ..... for the back issues checked above.

NAME_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ ZONE____ STATE_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The betrayal of the Holy Spirit! And I call as witnesses the Dead and the Living—I call upon his master, the great and wise philosopher Edmund Husserl—I call upon the immortal ideas of Nietzsche and Hölderlin! And among the Living I call upon the many who met Herr Heidegger after he had received the thirty shekels and the robe of the Rector from Hitler's henchmen. Hitler's shekels are inflated and the Rector's robe has shared the fate of Hitler's other wreckage.

Heidegger followed the example of Judas—he betrayed his master, the freedom and integrity of thought and spirit; Heidegger followed further—he accepted the payment; where shall we meet the philosopher next?

F. Duras

University of Melbourne
Australia

CORRECTION

The Editors wish to state that an error was made in the October issue in the pricing of *Hart Crane*. By Brom Weber. The Bodley Press. The correct price is $4.50.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946.

Of Partisan Review published monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1948. County of New York—ss.
State of New York

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Mary Wickware, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that she is the Business Manager of the Partisan Review and that the following is, to the best of her knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher: Allan D. Dowling, dlb, Added Enterprises, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y.
Editors: William Phillips and Philip Rahv, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y.
Managing editor: None
Business manager: Mary Wickware, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: Allan D. Dowling, dlb, Added Enterprises, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragrahps next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowldege and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

MARY WICKWARE, Business Manager

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of September, 1948.
George Dupree, Attorney & Counsellor-at-Law
(My commission expires March 30, 1949)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED

***CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS** are accepted for personal and literary services, publishing offers, miscellaneous items appealing to an intellectual audience, jobs wanted, houses for rent, tutoring, and other ideas of a nature suitable to Partisan Review's standards. Rates: 18c a word, 12 word minimum. Rates for several insertions—12 times 12c a word; 6 times 15c a word. Date of issue: first of each month. Advertisements must be in and paid for by the 2nd of the month preceding publication. Address Classified Department, Partisan Review, 1545 Broadway, New York 19.*

BOOKS

HARD TO FIND BOOKS LOCATED. Free Library Service. Your Wants Solicited. GEMINI BOOK SERVICE, 46-P Lewis Ave., Brooklyn 6, New York.

LITERARY SERVICES

WE PUBLISH, print and distribute your manuscript in pamphlet and book form. Send for free folder. WILLIAM-FREDERICK PRESS; PAMPHLET DISTRIBUTING CO., Inc., 313 W. 35th St., N.Y.C. 1, LA. 4-0178.

PROFITABLE BOOK PUBLICATION on even the limited sale of your book is possible. Details in our free copy of "We Can Publish Your Book." Dept. P, EXPOSITION PRESS, One Spruce St., N.Y.C. 7

PERIODICALS

BERKELEY: A Journal of Modern Culture, five issues $1, 74 Tamalpais Rd, Berkeley, California. Contributors: Sartre, Cummings, Sessions, Sherwood Anderson.

PERSONALS

YOUNG EDITOR AT NEW DIRECTIONS and charming Italian wife, quiet, responsible and cultured, seek apt., furnished or unfurnished, preferably Manhattan. McDowell, PE. 6-3861, 9 to 5.

MIDDLEBROW WRITER needs Manhattan apt with 1 HUGE sunlit room suitable for two jumping, barking, carousing, arrogant, Siamese cats. Box 11, PR, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. C. 19.

PUBLISHERS' OVERSTOCK

New Original Editions!
Buy these ideal Christmas gifts now while available!

The Tender Men: *Willa Gibbs*	.50
End of a Berlin Diary: *William Shirer*	.50
Idols of the Cave: *Frederic Prokosch*	.50
Emotional Hygiene: *C.M. Anderson, M.D.*	.50
The Cossacks: *Maurice Hindus*	.50
Twins of Nuremberg: *Hermann Kesten*	.50
The Indiscreet Muse (amatory verse)	.50
Independent People: *Halldor Laxness*	.50
The Last Circle: *Stephen V. Benet*	.50
A Wall to Paint On: *Ione Robinson*	.50
Stendhal: *Matthew Josephson*	1.00
Diaries of Tchaikovsky: *W. Lakond*	1.00
Samuel Johnson: *Joseph Wood Krutch*	1.00
The Muses' Darling (Marlowe): *Norman*	1.00
Bookman's Pleasure: *Holbrook Jackson*	1.00
Thurlow Weed (Lobbyist) *C. Van Deusen*	1.00
The Golden Voice (biography of Isaac Kalloch): *M. Marberry*	1.00
Best Short Stories of Theodore Dreiser	1.00
Days of Our Years: *V. Paasen* 2nd war. ed.	1.00
Poet in the Theatre: *Ronald Peacock*	1.00
The Forgotten Ally: *P. Van Paasen*	1.00
Trollope, A Commentary: *Michael Sadlier*	1.50
Pleasures of Peacock: *B. R. Redman*	1.50
Strange & Fantastic Stories: ($3.75 list) *J. Margolies, ed. intro., C. Morley*	1.50
Lincoln, The Liberal Statesman: *J. G. Randall* ($4.50 list)	1.75
Portrait of Latin America: (As Seen By Her Print Makers): $5.00 *Hastings*	2.00
U. S. A.: *John Dos Passos*, 3-volume deluxe $12.50 set —an Xmas gift now!	5.50
Music On Records: *B. Haggin* 4 rev. ed.	1.00
Helen of Troy: *Sara Teasdale*	1.00
Diet Does It: *Gaylord Hauser*	1.50
Grimm's Fairy Tales: illus. *Pantheon*	3.00
Tales of Hoffman: illus. (7.50 *Wwn* ed.)	3.00
Picasso: *M. & S. Janis*, ($7.50 list)	3.50

Post paid U.S.A. Minimum order $1
DOWNTOWN BOOK BAZAAR
212 Broadway New York 7, N. Y.

LIBERAL PRESS, INC.
printers of
PARTISAN REVIEW
•
80 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EXCEPTIONAL NEW BOOKS

from the **DODD, MEAD** Fall List

FIRE IN THE MORNING

A novel by ELIZABETH SPENCER. "Splendid talent. A remarkably strong first novel."—ROBERT PENN WARREN. "The number one literary discovery of the year."—HUDSON STRODE. $3.00

THE FLAME and the SERPENT

The Intercollegiate Fellowship Prize Novel

By HILDA OSTERHOUT. A rich, mature novel of the impact of Mexican culture and tradition on a visiting American girl. $3.00

BURNS MANTLE'S Best Plays of 1947-1948

and the Yearbook of the Drama in America

Edited by JOHN CHAPMAN. The 10 best plays of the past season, in excerpt and summary, plus lists of casts, length of run, plot digests, award and prize winners, and photographs from the plays. $4.00

IN SEARCH OF SOUTH AFRICA

By H. V. MORTON. The most widely-read travel writer of our time records his experiences in a frontier land of untamed jungles, fabulous cities, majestic natural scenery—and significant social unrest. *With photographs.* $4.00

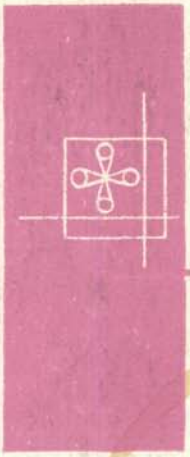
ANATOMY OF GENIUS

By FREDERIC TAUBES. This noted artist's invaluable guide to an intelligent evaluation of art shows, by actual comparisons, what makes certain works great while others are failures. *Many reproductions.* $5.00

At all bookstores, or from

DODD, MEAD & CO. · 432 Fourth Ave., N. Y. 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



1948

RACHEL BESPALOFF	9	*ON THE ILIAD* *Introduction by Hermann Broch* $2.50
HEINRICH ZIMMER	10	*THE KING AND THE CORPSE* *edited by Joseph Campbell* $3.75
M. ESTHER HARDING	11	*PSYCHIC ENERGY—* *ITS SOURCE AND GOAL* $4.50
HUNTINGTON CAIRNS	12	*THE LIMITS OF ART* *an anthology* $6.50
JAMES H. BREASTED, JR.	13	*EGYPTIAN SERVANT STATUES* $7.50
EDITH PORADA	14	*THE CORPUS OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SEALS IN NORTH AMERICAN COLLECTIONS* *(2 vols.—text and plates)* $15.00
ST. JOHN PERSE	15	*EXILE AND OTHER POEMS* *translated by Denis Devlin* $3.75
BLACKMUR, CROCE, PEYRE, RANSOM, READ, TATE	16	*THE JOHNS HOPKINS SYMPOSIUM ON CRITICISM* $2.75

BOLLINGEN SERIES

PANTHEON BOOKS, INC.

41 WASHINGTON SQUARE, NEW YORK 12

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED